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A Place of Yes? Experiences of Educators Participating in Site-based Teacher-led Reform

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A Place of Yes?

Experiences of Educators Participating in Site-based Teacher-led Reform

A Dissertation by

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Chapman University

Orange, California

Donna Ford Attallah College of Educational Studies

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

May 2020

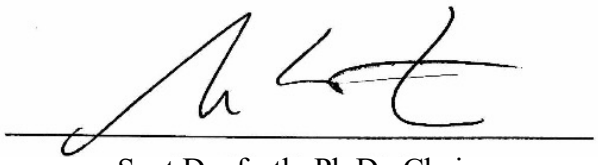
Committee in charge:

Scot Danforth, Ph.D., Chair

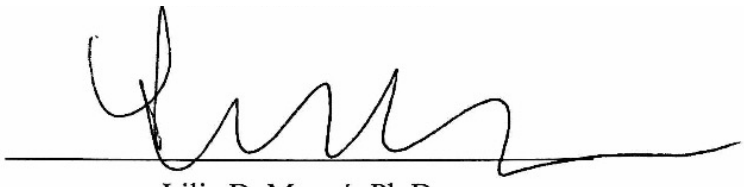
Penny Bryan, Ph.D.

Lilia Monzó, Ph.D.

The dissertation of Elizabeth Peale Hind is approved.



Scot Danforth, Ph.D., Chair



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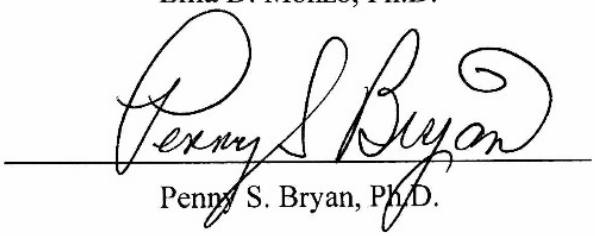

Penny S. Bryan, Ph.D.

March 2020

A Place of Yes? Experiences of Educators Participating in Site-based Teacher-led Reform

by Elizabeth Peale Hind

DEDICATION

For Nana and Scott,

Thank you for Everything.

I love you!

And for my students,

Who are my reason Why.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will be forever grateful to my committee – my "dream team" – for their support, for the inspiration they gave me, and for their belief in me throughout my dissertation process. These scholars are the academics I aspire to be, and I am so fortunate to have worked with them.

To my chair, Dr. Scot Danforth: I have so enjoyed working with you over the past four years, and I am so grateful to you for your open embrace of my methodology, your guidance, your insight and wisdom, your constant support, and your encouragement. Your belief in me kept me going when I had (so many) doubts about whether this junior high teacher had something to contribute and made me see that I did. Thank you, Scot. I am thankful and proud to know you.

To Dr. Lilia Monzó: Thank you for your support throughout my journey at Chapman, for your guidance and thoughtful candor, and for introducing me to the power of storytelling in research.

To Dr. Penny Bryan: You helped me see in myself an artist I did not know was there and introduced me to a world of research I did not know existed but in which I found a home. Thank you for this gift and for helping me embrace unfinishedness. *Ancora imparo. Avanti!*

I wish to acknowledge and thank the Donna Ford Attallah College of Education at Chapman University for its outstanding Ph.D. program. This has been a life-changing experience, and I am so grateful to the school, its faculty, and staff for the challenges, opportunities, and support over the past six years. Thank you, Dr. Dawn Hunter, for coordinating this program, for your mentorship, and for your friendship – your unwavering support and encouragement have meant the world to me.

I also wish to acknowledge the late Dr. Carl Leggo: I am so thankful to you for the generosity, kindness, and guidance you showed me, for your mentorship, and for the incredible influence you and your work had on both my scholarly work and my work as a teacher. Sleep well, Professor…

I would never have been able to begin this doctoral journey nor complete it were it not for the unending love and support of my family. My parents – Mom, Bob, Dad, Mayo – and brother Tom have been sources of strength, inspiration, and grounding throughout this process. I love you all. Thank you, and *¡gracias!*

My education was made possible by my Nana and Scott, who always believed in me and who inspired and continue to inspire me as an educator and human being. You are the best people I've known, and I am blessed that you were and are in my life. May I always live by your example of love, humility, and generosity.

To my husband and poetry partner, David: From Redlands to now, it's always been you. You have walked this road with me, my fellow adventurer, and loved me through it all. Thank you for being you and for the magic and passion you bring to this world, your students, and me. I love you beyond measure, Dayve with a Y.

I wish to thank my administrators in the Anaheim Union High School District: Michael Matsuda, Jaron Fried, Sam Joo, Amber Houston, David Dorosky, and Sean Pfeiffer for their constant support and generous accommodation as I balanced my scholarly life with my teaching life.

I also wish to thank my friends Anne Castagnaro, Rachel Parillo, David Wardle, Russ Day, Dena Guerry, and Kristin Lehere for the moral support, encouragement, and levity they gave me as I was on this journey.

To my students, past and present: Through all my years of teaching, you have inspired me and been my reason for doing what I do. You are the reason I started this doctoral journey, and I hope that this work and the work I do in the future makes a better educational world for you and those who come after you.

To my participants: Thank you for your courage, candor, and for allowing me into your educators' hearts. Your stories live here.

VITA

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy	March 17, 2020, Chapman University Orange, CA Dissertation Title: A place of yes? Experiences of educators participating in teacher-led site-based reform Dissertation Committee Chair: Scot Danforth, Ph.D.
Master of Education	May 2011, University of Southern California Los Angeles, CA Emphasis: Educational Psychology and Informational Technology
Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential Introductory English Credential	May 1997, Concordia University Irvine, CA Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development certificate
Bachelor of Arts	August 1995, University of Redlands Redlands, CA Major: English - Creative Writing emphasis Minor: Spanish

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Lives of teachers; arts-based research methodologies; engaged pedagogies; experiential learning; inclusion, belonging, and school connectedness

PUBLICATIONS

I am contributing two chapters to a book on Arts-Based Research Methodologies and the Dissertation, edited by Dr. Penny Bryan. We are in negotiations with Routledge, and the anticipated publication is 2021.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Hind, E. P.; Cooley, K.; Stewart, M.; Naudin, J.; & Larsen, S. (Under review.). "Empowering Middle School Agents of Change: The Tolerance Summit." Paper to be presented at the 2020 National Association of Multicultural Education annual meeting; Birmingham, Alabama.

Hind, E.; Stewart, M.; Day, R.; & Wardle, D. "ACE: Engaging students' ways of knowing through an arts-based interdisciplinary capstone project." Paper presented at the California Educational Research Association (CERA) annual meeting, November 30, 2017; Anaheim, California.

Hind, E. "Arts-based inquiry: Using creative pedagogies across the 7-12 curriculum." Workshop presented at Going Further with our Writing Journey: Equity Through Language and Literacy, October 9, 2017; Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, California.

Hind, E. "Naming their world: Spoken word as praxis in the middle school." Paper presented at the Twenty-third International Conference on Learning, July 13, 2016; University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Hind, E. "Art everywhere! Creative writing across the disciplines." Paper presented at Writing Journey: AUHSD Professional Learning Day, October 12, 2015; Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, California.

Hind, E. "Collaborative film project: Middle school students as digital storytellers." Paper presented at the Twenty-second International Conference on Learning, July 10, 2015; Universidad San Pablo CEU, Madrid, Spain.

GRANTS

Collaborative film project. Elizabeth Hind, Principal Investigator; Russell Day, Co-Investigator. California Technology Assistance Program, $7,000; 2013.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Chapman University Orange, CA	Lecturer, Summer 2019 EDUC 696 Master of Arts in Teaching: Capstone Design
	Teaching Assistant, Summer 2017 EDUC 762 Special Topics in Advanced Research Methods: Arts-Based Research Methodologies
Anaheim Union High School District	Teacher, 2002-present Lexington Junior High School; Cypress, CA Subjects taught: Reading intervention, English, journalism, photography, art, creative writing, applied technology, Spanish
	Teacher, 2001-2002 Orangeview Junior High School; Anaheim, CA Subjects taught: History, science, math
Diocese of Orange	Teacher, grade 5, 2000-2001 Serra Catholic School; Rancho Santa Margarita, CA
Newport-Mesa Unified School District	Teacher, grade 4, 1997-2000 Kaiser Elementary School; Costa Mesa, CA

SERVICE

Visual and Performing Arts Distance Curriculum Committee, Anaheim Union High School District; 2020.
Local Control Accountability Plan committee member, Anaheim Union High School District; 2020
Reflective Research Practice Partnership Site Coordinator; 2020
Site Leadership Team, Lexington Junior High School; 2019-present
School Site Council, Lexington Junior High School; 2011-2018; 2019-present
Program creator, developer, and coordinator; Achieving Creative Excellence interdisciplinary honors program, Lexington Junior High School; 2014-present
Journalism Advisor, Lexington Junior High School, 2011-present
Advisor, Gay Straight Alliance, Lexington Junior High School; 2015-2018

Integrated Educational Studies ePortfolio Reviewer; College of Educational Studies, Chapman University; 2016
Proposal reviewer; National Association of Multicultural Education Conference; 2015, 2016
Technology Committee member, Lexington Junior High School; 2014-2016
Master Teacher, Lexington Junior High School; 2003, 2012, 2015
Reading Department Chairman, Lexington Junior High School; 2003-2014
Professional Learning Community Site Implementation Team, Lexington Junior High School; 2014
Common Core Task Force, Anaheim Union High School District; 2013-2014
Lesson Design Specialist, Anaheim Union High School District; 2013-2014
Common Core Site Implementation Lead, Lexington Junior High School; 2011-2013
Response to Intervention Site Team, Lexington Junior High School; 2011-2013
Literacy Task Force, Anaheim Union High School District; 2011-2012
Language Arts Textbook Adoption Committee, Anaheim Union High School District; 2003, 2009
Functional Reading Curriculum Development Committee, Anaheim Union High School District; 2004
Planning Committee Member/Costume Coordinator, Renaissance Experience Open House, Lexington Junior High School; 2003, 2004

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES: PERFORMANCES, EXHIBITS, AND VISUAL ARTS

all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (September 20-November 7, 2019), Photograph displayed in faculty art show, Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, CA.

Cheetah Chrome. (September 20-November 7, 2019), Photograph displayed in faculty art show, Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, CA.

UFO. (September 20-November 7, 2019), Photograph displayed in faculty art show, Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, CA.

Hegemony and hidden curriculum in middle school iconography. (May 17, 2017), Interactive 3D mixed-media installation in "The Salon: Current Controversies in Education," Chapman University, Orange, CA.

Blessed are the poor. (January 18, 2017), Painting in juried art show "Surviving Trump: The Art of Resistance," World of Wonder Gallery, Hollywood, CA.

Toward Untested Feasibility. (May 20, 2015), Interactive 3D mixed-media installation in an art exhibit celebrating the work of Henry Giroux, Chapman University, Orange, CA.

AWARDS AND HONORS

California Democracy School	Application writer, 2019
California Distinguished School	Application writer, 2019
California Distinguished School	Application writer, 2019
Exemplary Arts Education Award	Application writer, 2017
Gold Ribbon School	Board of Trustees Kindness Matters Award, 2016
Anaheim Union High School District; Anaheim, California	Teacher of the Year, 2016
Lexington Junior High School; Cypress, California	All-Columbian Honors (top 95th percentile in nation) in Photography and Reference categories, 2014
Columbia Scholastic Press Association	Gold Medalist Certificate, 2014 Silver Medalist Certificate, 2013 Gold Medalist Certificate, 2012
	First Class Review with three Marks of Distinction, 2014
National Scholastic Press Association	Application writer, 2013
California Distinguished School	Renaissance Experience Open House, 2003
Golden Bell Award	

HONORARY AND PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Educational Research Association
Association for Middle Level Education
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Design
California Art Education Association
California Educational Research Association
International Visual Sociology Association
National Association for Multicultural Education

Kappa Delta Pi honor society
Phi Delta Kappa International
Phi Kappa Phi honor society
Sigma Delta Pi honor society

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Mongers of St. Swithin Renaissance Pleasure Faire	Assistant director of stage and improvisational street theatre performance group; 2018-present Performer; 2015-present
Delta Kappa Psi; University of Redlands	Advisory team member; 2016-present Alumnae newsletter editor; 2014-2020
Alpha Phi International Fraternity	Recruitment advisor, Eta Beta/California State University San Bernardino; 2016 House Corporation Board, Eta Kappa/UC Irvine; member 2008-2015, President 2013-2015 Collegiate Chapter Administrator, Western Quadrant; 2013 Operations and Programming Coordinator, Southwest Region; 2012-2013 Chapter advisor, Eta Kappa/UC Irvine; 2010-2012 Program development advisor, Eta Kappa/UC Irvine; 2009-2010
Ad Hoc Consort Renaissance Pleasure Faire	Tenor recorder and vocalist in early music performance group; 2012-2015
College Summit	Writing Coach; summer workshops 2008, 2009

ABSTRACT

A Place of Yes? Experiences of Educators Participating in Site-based Teacher-led Reform

by Elizabeth Peale Hind

This study examined the experiences of four teachers who participated as mentors in a teacher-designed and -implemented creative community at a middle school in southern California. Using the arts-based research methodologies of poetic inquiry, narrative inquiry, and painting, the researcher explored how teachers experience teaching and learning when they deconstruct structures that perpetuate standardization and choose to approach education as a *place of yes*, freed from the parameters of mandated curriculum, the idea of education as product, and high-stakes accountability measures. The study revealed that the qualities of the creative community had a humanizing effect on its participants, allowing these teachers to transcend toxic school culture, oppressive educational structures, and ideological and spatial faculty divisions, and allowed the participating teachers to connect with one another on professional and personal levels.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What If?

A colleague, Linnea, and I met for lunch during spring break. We both taught at Las Colinas Junior High School in the same department. We saw each other frequently at meetings, at school events, and in passing in the hallways, but with everything we respectively had going on at school and in our non-school lives, it had been ages since we had been able to just sit down together and catch up with one another as friends rather than just as co-workers.

As often happens when educators get together socially, our friendly conversation soon turned to school. There was a great deal of apprehension among teachers at Las Colinas about the future of certain electives and about some trainings we were strongly encouraged to attend over the summer. The teachers were certain that the district was about to spring a new mandate on us, and nobody was sure that our faculty could handle it. We were still reeling from the considerable transitions and mandates we had dealt with over the past three years.

Local History

Change is never easy, but Las Colinas Junior High and its school district, Arroyo Seco, had been through a great deal of change in a relatively short period of time. The shift from the skill-based No Child Left Behind to the performance-based Common Core had been tumultuous. Language arts teachers rejoiced over the simplified standards and the potential for other core subject areas to shoulder some of the instructional load with regard to content area reading and writing. Science, math, and history teachers were apprehensive, because they did not know what the Common Core would look like for them; their standards were still in development.

The shift to the Common Core coincided with administrative changes at the district level, including the appointment of a new superintendent, who brought a new vision for approaches to

academic programming, community partnerships, and student engagement. And on top of adjusting to the significant curricular and district-level changes, the Las Colinas faculty was navigating through a substantial transition of its own: Two years earlier, the principal, who had led the school for the previous decade, was promoted within the Arroyo Seco School District. The time since then could be characterized by inconsistency and uncertainty, with the main office seeming to be a revolving door for administrators. In the following two years and two months, Las Colinas Junior High School had three principals, each of whom had very different leadership and communication styles, visions, and priorities for the school. The inconsistent leadership caused a great deal of anxiety and consternation among faculty members, particularly when the first of three new principals spoke of his vision of Las Colinas as a STEM (science technology engineering math) magnet school. Teachers' reactions to this news ranged from apprehension about what a STEM magnet school would look like to outright fury that teachers had been left out of discussions about such a significant new direction for the school. Teachers in the visual and performing arts (VAPA) department were particularly alarmed, as Las Colinas was known for the high quality of its arts electives, and they were concerned that creation of a STEM magnet school would eliminate these programs.

The magnet school furor at Las Colinas was short-lived. The principal was transferred to another school. The next principal had a vision of his own, but two months into his tenure at Las Colinas, he was transferred to a position at the district office, and a third new principal was appointed as an interim administrator to fill his vacancy. Nearly a full academic year passed before her appointment to that position was made permanent.

These transitions had a negative effect on Las Colinas' faculty morale. Arroyo Seco School District administrators encouraged educators to innovate at the site level, and many

teachers at other schools throughout the district took advantage of opportunities that presented themselves and implemented new projects and new programs with success and accolades from the district and the community. However, at Las Colinas, teachers were reticent to try anything new. Now, over lunch, Linnea and I discussed these effects and pondered where to go from here.

"I feel like we need to bring people together again," I said. "There used to be so much collaboration. People used to try new things."

Linnea shrugged. "People have just been told what to do for so long," she said. "They don't want to try anything new, because they're afraid they'll get shot down. They've seen it happen time and again. It's just what education is. For teachers *and* students."

The server refilled Linnea's coffee. Linnea emptied a packet of sugar into her cup and stirred before she continued.

"So much of schooling is like, 'You have to follow this rule. You have to be here at this time. No, you can't go to the bathroom. No, you can't do this.' But what if... What if school was like, 'Sure, you wanna make a cityscape out of Play-Doh? All right!'"

She sipped her coffee and sighed.

"What if school was a place where someone told you 'Yes' instead of always saying 'No?' What would happen then, and what would school be then?"

What if?

A Place of Yes?

A cohort of teachers at Las Colinas Junior High School, on their own and without direction from site or district leadership, answered that "What if?" question by creating their own

place of yes through the establishment and implementation of a creative community, the first teacher-driven and -led site-based reform at the school in over 20 years. The establishment of this community was formed from teachers' ideas of what a creative arts-based small learning community that would honor students' aesthetic and creative ways of knowing might look like at their school.

Community Overview

Las Colinas' creative community invited students to join and to "create with abandon" projects of their own choice and design. Students could complete a creative community project independently, in pairs, or in a team that they put together themselves. Community participation was open to all students at Las Colinas; to be a part, students had to submit a project proposal to explain their ideas. These proposals were reviewed by the cohort of community teachers.

The project proposals were not used as gatekeepers to participation in the community. Rather, the teachers reviewed the proposals to determine whether projects were feasible financially and in scope for middle school students to complete on their own. Teachers also considered whether the proposed project was within an individual student's skill set while allowing room for growth; since the creative community was seen as a way to exercise creativity in a medium of the students' choosing, as opposed to learning a medium, students were expected to have a base level of training and skill in their projects' media. If a project was felt to be too large-scale, the teachers suggested modifications that would make the project doable. For example, a 7th grade student wanted to create a multimedia installation that would incorporate video edited on Adobe Premiere, even though he had no experience with any Creative Suite application and did not have access to this program at home or through any of his classes at

school. The teachers suggested that the student revise his project to use iMovie video production software, which he had on his computer at home and had used for school projects previously.

Proposal review also allowed the teachers to determine the best faculty mentor for each proposed student project. Each individual student or student team was assigned a faculty mentor who acted as a resource, guide, and cheerleader for the student(s) and the project. While some matching of mentors was consistent with the teachers' credentialed subject areas (e.g. an English teacher mentored a student who wrote a novel), matching could also be based on a teacher's own outside interests (e.g. an English teacher who engaged in photography as a hobby mentored a student who completed a photography project). This matching-by-interest was possible, because the creative community was completed outside of instructional time and not associated with any course offered at Las Colinas, thus compliance with credentialing was not required.

Once students' proposals were approved and students were matched with faculty mentors, the students worked on their creative community projects over the course of the academic year. Students met with their mentors at least once a month to discuss their progress and to troubleshoot challenges that arose. Some students used their mentors' classrooms as makerspaces during lunch or after school. The resulting projects were varied in media and ideas: Creative community projects included a photography installation, novels, poetry anthologies, original dances, comedy sketches written and performed by students, paintings, original songs, costume designs for original stories, and music videos.

During the fourth quarter of the academic year, the students' creative community projects were presented at open house, the district's STEAM carnival, or in another public forum. Several students used self-publishing programs to publish novels they had written and sold them through major online booksellers. Students also shared their projects with teachers,

administrators, and community members during a reflective interview, similar in format to a dissertation defense. Students who completed a project as part of the creative community received special recognition and certificates at the school's annual awards ceremony, with some students, whose projects were felt to be exceptionally well done, receiving a high honors medal.

Designing the Community

The cohort of teachers used appreciative inquiry to design the creative community. Appreciative inquiry is an approach to school reform that asks stakeholders to define the area of focus, identify the areas of strength and programs that are working, make normative statements that envision what could be, design a way that the normative statements might be implemented, and then implement and integrate these ideas into a school's program (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). The approach focuses on positive elements and desired outcomes, rather than negative aspects and what about or why a school is failing, and fosters a safe space for innovation.

Cohort teachers felt that the Las Colinas community did an exceptional job at recognizing students' academic and athletic achievements, but there were many students who were talented – gifted, even – in artistic areas and thus did not gain notice for their abilities. The teachers felt that there should be an extracurricular opportunity at the school that could provide students with a creative outlet while underscoring the importance of the arts in a school's comprehensive academic program. The middle school setting offered a prime – and possible final – opportunity for students to explore creative disciplines.

This idea was supported by William Kist (2012), who wrote of middle school's unique position to facilitate students' exploration: "Kids of this age are open to trying new things and want to test out new ideas. They bring their ideas, their motivations, and their general lack of

resistance to the classroom" (p. 18). Middle school might also be the last opportunity students had to explore arts and career disciplines during their K-12 education. In high school, students' academic trajectories were generally locked in as they chart courses of study that will lead, at minimum, to high school graduation. If students chose a rigorous college preparatory track or one of California's Career Pathways (California Department of Education, 2014), their options for elective courses became significantly limited to those which were college-approved or fulfilled Pathway requirements. If a student did not have the opportunity to explore disciplines in middle school, that opportunity might not have come again. The cohort of teachers wanted to be sure that every student had access to exploration. The cohort also wanted to engage students at Las Colinas who might not have otherwise found ways to connect to their school community.

The design of the community was also informed by scholarly literature on the topics of small learning communities and creative communities of practice. The teachers were inspired by the positive outcomes documented in a study of a small learning community (SLC) at the Peoples Academy in Morristown, Vermont (Gajda & Dorfman, 2006). The SLC, called Peoples Academy Career Academy of the Arts (PACAA), engaged and supported students through arts-integrated academic classes, teacher mentorship and goal-setting, and participation in school-community collaborations. Students were included in decision-making processes regarding programs, projects, and field trips. Evaluation of PACAA indicated that the arts-based program engaged students who had previously not been reached while challenging "students already considered successful" (p. 18). The program also created real-world connections between student learning and real work. Parents praised PACAA for allowing their children to explore and develop talents and for increasing students' confidence and independence.

Rebecca Gadja and Dorinne Dorfman's study (2006) indicated that arts-based academies like PACAA could help eradicate "the typical corporate organization and culture of high school in which students' relationships are characterized by isolation from community members, hierarchical structures, a pronounced pressure to carry out a role-oriented individual identity, and one-dimensional, task-based interpersonal relations" (p. 18). This statement suggested that such programs reach students who do not fit into the typical organization and culture of a school – the very students for whom the creative community was designed. The cohort of teachers at Las Colinas decided that a SLC model would be a good way to go about designing a community for their school.

While studies of SLCs found that participating students' experiences were largely positive, with students identifying strongly with their learning community, some students felt that their experiences were impersonal and irrelevant; they wanted a personalized, challenging experience and felt that this was missing from the SLCs (Armstead, Bessell, Sembiante, & Pacheco Plaza, 2010). To address this potential deficiency in the creative community at Las Colinas, the teachers incorporated mentorships, in which participating teachers advise and guide students, into the program design.

Community Implementation

To facilitate the creative community during its inaugural year, eight teachers collaborated with one another to coordinate interdisciplinary projects and mentor students who engaged in the collaborative creative projects. The creative community was run as a co-curricular enrichment opportunity for students; collaboration took place outside of class time. This is a departure from most small learning community models, in which the community and collaboration are built into the master schedule (Gajda & Dorfman, 2006; Patterson, 2006; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). In

SLC models where the communities have been integrated in part or completely into a school's academic program, teachers who are part of the community are often given dedicated planning time, such as a common conference period or dedicated time on late start or early release days (Armstead et al., 2010).

This was not the case at Las Colinas Junior High School and remains so. The teachers participating in the creative community have never been given guaranteed planning time: They have met casually in passing on campus, occasionally during lunch, and on the reflective interview day, if there was any remaining time once all the students had presented. When the community was in its early stages – and Title II money was available – the teachers had one release day to plan and map out the year, but since that day four years ago, the cohort teachers have collaborated and planned, as well as interacted with their student mentees, entirely outside of their regular school day and duties.

It is important to emphasize that the cohort teachers have never received a stipend or other financial compensation for their participation time. The school has allocated no money toward the creative community. By comparison, athletic coaches receive financial compensation for their single quarters of coaching time, and advisors for programs that have time obligations outside of school, such as band or speech and debate, receive a stipend as specified in the district's certificated teacher contract.

Nor has participation in the creative community counted toward fulfilling each teacher's six-hours of required adjunct duties. Every teacher is required, by contract, to complete six hours of adjunct duty, such as chaperoning a dance, supervising intramural sports, or being present at an evening performing arts recital. Even though the creative community teachers spend well over six hours on creative community-related activities that directly benefit students,

they are not given adjunct credit for their mentorships and are still required to chaperone or supervise for six hours to complete their adjunct duty requirement.

Aside from a principal agreeing to establishment of the community in advance of implementation, the school's administration has played no role in the creative community aside from attending students' reflective interviews if they were able. This community has been and is facilitated and run entirely by teachers and the students who opt to join.

The Research

Research Problem

The standardization and accountability culture that characterizes America's educational system facilitates structures that significantly restrict teachers' professional practices and their ability to innovate. Reform efforts are top-down, and teachers rarely have a voice in policy and curricular decisions that affect them directly. Even modes of communication within school organizations are standardized, with set protocols dictating how, when, and about which topics teachers may speak. The result of this *system of no* is a demoralizing professional environment.

The creative community teachers at Las Colinas Junior High School took matters into their own hands when they started the creative community, rejecting the structures imposed upon them and building their own community of practice in response to a specific local need and students' interests, without the infrastructure or financial support that curricular departments and other school programs receive. This study examined the experiences of the teachers who created this bottom-up student-centered reform within a top-down, high accountability educational system.

Research Purpose

In a 2006 interview, Michael Fullan said, "We have wasted a ton of money on aligning curriculum, assessment, standards, and professional development for teachers and principals. Although these things are necessary, they are not sufficient. What we have forgotten is the culture of the school and this begins with listening to teachers" (Oberg, 2008, p. 16).

This study allowed teachers' voices to be heard: It explored the lived experiences of teachers as they implemented a creative community of their own conception and design at their school site, with the goal of understanding how teachers approach and experience their profession when they reject the structures, curriculum requirements, accountability measures, and federal, state, district, and site-level mandates imposed upon them and instead choose to engage in teaching and learning in their purest forms. Using the arts-based methodologies of poetic, narrative, and visual inquiry, I examined the experiences of Las Colinas Junior High School teachers as they created their own *place of yes* within the *system of no*. Specifically, I was curious about how participation in a community of practice and how being given permission and freedom to innovate might affect teachers professionally and personally, as extant literature about school reform largely focused on student outcomes and conditions for successful implementation. This inquiry was framed by the educational philosophy of John Dewey, critical pedagogy, and engaged pedagogy.

Research Questions

This inquiry was guided by the following questions:

1. What happens when, despite working within a *system of no,* teachers decide to deconstruct structures that perpetuate standardization and choose to approach teaching and learning as a *place of yes?*

2. How do teachers experience teaching and learning when, in this one corner of their work that they have carved for themselves, they are freed from the parameters of mandated curriculum, the idea of education as product, and high-stakes accountability measures?

3. How might permission and freedom to innovate in this one area of their work affect teachers professionally and/or personally in their careers as a whole?

Significance of Study

This study is significant in that the ideas explored in this study – student-centered education in its purest form, unfettered by standards and accountability measures; the implementation of teacher-designed reform in response to specific local needs; whether and how teachers' experiences within the implementation influence them personally and professionally outside of the implementation – have not been addressed in extant literature and are largely ignored in practice. This study sought to provide a forum for teachers' voices within the profession and fill the spaces in the literature where teachers' voices are absent by sharing the teachers' stories. In this study, the participant teachers' experiences and feelings during the implementation process are shared, their feelings about their profession revealed.

I conducted this inquiry with the hope that the narratives shared during the research process and the research findings will resonate with an audience of scholars and educational practitioners, generate further discussion about how educators interact and collaborate, and influence collaborative practices in educational settings. The stories of my participants, shared here, present challenges that should invigorate conversations about the nature of standardized education, its structures, and its effects – both intended and unintended – on educational stakeholders.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Section I: The American Educational Landscape and the Arts Within It

The establishment and implementation of Las Colinas Junior High School's creative community took place within the context of the American and Californian education systems, both of which are characterized by reforms and mandates which have evolved over the past half century. These reforms and mandates have put increasing restriction on educators' ability to innovate and differentiate schools' academic programs to best meet the needs of their respective student populations.

Linnea's question, posed in chapter 1, of what education would be like if school were a place of *yes* suggests that the opposite is true: School is a place of *no*. An examination of the American educational landscape reveals that the problem is systemic: American education is a *system of no*, characterized by standards and accountability culture and a narrowing and standardization of educational goals and curriculum. Furthermore, this system marginalizes the creative disciplines and the teachers who teach them. Educational leaders may encourage teachers and students to "think outside the box," but the unspoken warning to teachers is "Don't color outside the lines."

The reviewed literature provides a historical perspective of the system of no that is American education. The first part is a survey of the American educational landscape and its culture of accountability as it has developed over the last 35 years. This survey includes a review of art education's positioning within the system of no, from the aftermath of *A Nation at Risk* to the current marginalization of the arts taking place under Common Core. The state of arts education in California will also be discussed, as the teachers at Las Colinas Junior High

School work within that system. The second part of this literature review looks at how a narrowing and standardization of education has increasingly permeated the teaching profession.

Accountability Culture from 1983 to Present

A Nation at Risk

In 1983, the National Commission on Educational Excellence (NCEE) released a report that skewered American education, citing "dropping test scores and lagging international competitiveness as indicators of poor teaching and inadequate student learning" (Richerme, 2012). This report, *A Nation at Risk*, "was part of a concerted campaign – based on exaggerated and often downright misleading evidence – to stir up widespread concerns about our schools and, consequently, demands for more testing" (Kohn, 2000; p. 3).

A Nation at Risk used inflammatory rhetoric to paint a dreary scene in which Japan, South Korea, and Germany surpass the United States in manufacturing industries and American society itself is threatened. "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war," read the report (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983, p. 5). The report went on to make a series of recommendations for American education, including implementation of "rigorous and measurable standards" (NCEE, 1983, p. 27) that are assessed with standardized tests.

President Ronald Reagan used his weekly radio address to comment on *A Nation at Risk.* "Our education system, once the finest in the world, is in a sorry state of disrepair," he said. (Reagan Foundation, 2011). The president then described the 20-year decline of education as "years when the federal presence in education grew and grew, parental control over local schools

shrank, bureaucracy ballooned until accountability seemed lost, parents were frustrated and didn't know where to turn" (Reagan Foundation, 2011).

A Nation at Risk (1983) was, and is, a curious document. For all its allegations, the report cites no sources, does not elucidate its methodologies or sample sizes, and does not substantiate results with any verifiable evidence. The appendices contain no reference lists; they merely contain the charter for the NCEE, the commission's schedule of public events, a list of titles of commissioned papers, and a list of people who participated in hearings.

But despite its curiosities, *A Nation at* Risk is significant in that this report, particularly its recommendations pertaining to rigorous standards and accountability through the administration of standardized tests, launched the modern accountability movement that would later rearrange the educational landscape and nearly eliminate arts education.

Toward Civilization

In 1985, as part of its reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts and with concern for the country's cultural welfare, Congress commissioned a study to examine the state of arts education. The resulting report was *Toward Civilization*, released in 1988 (Burton, 1992; Herbert, 1995), and its concerns about arts education paralleled many of the concerns raised about general education in *A Nation at Risk.*

> The report concluded that the arts in U.S. schools were in triple jeopardy: they were not viewed as serious learning; knowledge in and about the arts, in addition to acquiring skills in creating, producing, and performing in the arts, was not viewed as an objective; and those who determine what is to be taught in schools did not agree on what should constitute arts education. (Herbert, 1995, p. 14)

In *Toward Civilization*, the National Endowment for the Arts (1988) made a series of recommendations for arts education. These recommendations are summarized below:

1. An arts curriculum across all grade levels should be established. The curriculum should include each of the artistic disciplines, art history, critical analysis, and opportunity for production and performance. The arts should be included in the requirements for high school graduation.
2. Students should be assessed and arts education programs should be evaluated to measure learning and program effectiveness.
3. Trained arts specialists should be recruited to teach arts courses at all levels of K-12 schooling. Arts teacher recruiting strategies should be strengthened, and state certification agencies should develop flexible procedures to accelerate credentialing for artists and arts professionals who would like to enter the teaching profession.
4. Research in arts education should be given greater support to facilitate more longitudinal studies at the local, state, and national levels and to inform future decision-making about arts education.

The report's recommendations for defining curriculum coincided with the emergence of the Discipline Based Arts Education (DBAE) approach developed by the J. Paul Getty Center for Education in the Arts (Eisner, 1988). DBAE marked a significant shift in how arts education was conceptualized, because it was the first movement toward arts education standards (Eisner, 2000).

Discipline Based Art Education

Elliot Eisner (1988) was a member of the board that developed DBAE. He wrote that, as America reassessed its education system following Russia's launch of Sputnik, American arts

educators reassessed their own "field to see if we too could bring more substance and structure to what we were teaching and, perhaps more important[ly], to reexamine our thinking about what we ought to be teaching" (p. 185). Over time, this reckoning questioned the goals and function of art education, the ways that art can be taught, and the role of the arts teacher. Educators recognized that "a decent education… requires more than the simple skills of learning to read, write, and compute" (p. 186) and that "the arts have something special to offer the child, something that was indigenous to art" (p. 185). The board at the Getty explored how they could combine these ideas into a curricular structure to develop a new approach to arts education.

The result was DBAE, which reframed arts education as an academic content area on equal footing with other disciplines (Eisner, 1988; Davis, 2005). These could be taught in a similar manner to other academic subjects and by classroom teachers (Davis, 2008). DBAE's curricular structure centered on operations within four domains: Art production, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics (Eisner, 1988; Davis, 2008).

DBAE's Four Domains. DBAE was "intended to expand the child's ability to cope with problems in each of these four domains" (Eisner, 1988, p. 189).

Until DBAE was developed, art production was the primary component of art education. Students created art products, often without instruction or guidance from a teacher. The creation was the sole objective. DBAE enhanced the operation of art production by facilitating intelligent thought about the creation of visual images. Students were encouraged to create with intentionality, to explore the expressive power of their creations, and to create coherent and insightful art products (Eisner, 1988).

The art criticism component of DBAE developed students' "ability to see, not merely look at the qualities that constitute the visual world – a world that includes, yet exceeds, formal works of art" (Eisner, 1988, p. 189).

Through factual background that contextualized works of art within the times and places of their creations, art history contributed to students' understanding of works of art (Eisner, 1988; Davis, 2008).

The aesthetics component of DBAE fostered students' ability to make judgements about the art they see by applying a variety of criteria to the art and reflecting on the art's meaning (Eisner, 1988).

Concerns and Criticism. One of the primary critiques of DBAE was that the approach was too academic (Koroscik, 1997) and seemed to shoehorn arts education into general curriculum boxes, potentially losing art's magic while establishing its academic legitimacy (Eisner, 1988; Davis, 2005; Noddings, 2005). "Would the reformulating of arts curriculum into the same structures of language and measurements that supported other subjects remove the arts of their power to serve essential needs?" Jessica Hoffman Davis (2005) asked (p. 95).

Nel Noddings (2005) voiced concern for the effect that turning creative subjects into heavily academic ones might have on students, wondering "what will happen to all those young people who for years have found the art room the only place in school worth attending, whose interest in art has kept them in school long enough to qualify for a chance at life's standard goods" (p. 161).

Eisner (1988) referenced Dewey (1934) in his response to critics, noting that DBAE lent educational significance to art experiences, allowing students to transfer the application of these experiences to the world.

> "For experience to have educational significance, the individual should develop from it the ability to cope intelligently with the problems he will invariably encounter in the world. For art educators, it is the arts, and the visual arts in particular, that provide the occasions for these problems. Programmes of art education that have a significant educational yield for children enable them to think more intelligently about art and its various manifestations in the world" (Eisner, 1988, pp. 188-189).

The involvement of the J. Paul Getty Center for Education in the Arts also generated contention. Some arts educators viewed the Getty as an interloper into the world of arts education and did not want the organization involving itself with pedagogy and personal professional preferences. Others disagreed with the Getty's curricular stance (Eisner, 2000).

Decline. By 2000, the Getty Education Institute had all but folded its operations due to retirements and changes in administrative priorities. The Getty retained two professionals to run what remained of the institute, but neither person had arts training (Eisner, 2000).

Approaching the Millennium

America 2000. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush announced America 2000, a blueprint that would direct American education reform into the new millennium. America 2000 included six goals for national education, the third of which defined the core curriculum as English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. Arts educators were dismayed that the arts were not included on this list (Burton, 1992; Herbert, 1995). They were concerned that funds would be diverted from the arts and other non-core subjects of the curriculum to the core subjects identified explicitly in the America 2000 goals (Burton, 1992), which could result in program cuts.

The ensuing advocacy campaign was impressive as arts teachers, artists, business people, parents, and community members spoke in favor of including arts as a core subject (Herbert, 1995). The absence of arts from America 2000 gained worldwide attention when the president of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, Michael Greene, criticized America 2000 for omitting arts and music from its goals (1992 Michael Greene Grammy Speech, 2012). The advocacy campaign and Greene's speech were effective: While America 2000 was never enacted (Wallender, 2014), the arts gained recognition as an essential component of a comprehensive education – a core subject – with the passage of Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Herbert, 1995).

Goals 2000. Goals 2000: Educate America Act was signed into law in early 1994. This legislation allocated millions of dollars in education grants that schools could use at the local level to implement programs aligned with the law's eight goals. Goals 2000 included, for the first time, the arts as a core subject (Herbert, 1995).

The legislation also introduced content and achievement standards on a large scale. Where curriculum maps and scope and sequence charts presented the content that should be taught at a given grade level, content and achievement standards set criteria for student outcomes. The standards were promoted by the idea that "all students can meet high expectations through the adoption of curriculum content and achievement standards" (Herbert, 1995, p. 16).

As a core subject, the arts were included in this new standards movement. In 1994, the National Standards for the Arts were published for the first time. These standards "provided a broad framework for the development of arts curricula" (Sabol, 2013, p. 41). State departments

of education used this framework as a guide to develop arts standards that would be comprehensive yet tailored to the unique cultures and needs of state and local students.

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 drastically reshaped education in the United States. The legislation promised accountability, local control and parent choice, and use of data-driven evidence-based instructional methods (Chapman, 2004; Wallender, 2014). What it delivered was "the most elaborate case of federal micromanagement of state policy, local schools, and teachers in the entire history of American education" (Chapman, 2007, p. 25).

One goal of the NCLB legislation was to transform education into a system of market-based competition-driven schools (Chapman, 2007; Kohn, 2004; Ohanian, 2003). To create this competitive market, NCLB required schools to meet annual yearly progress (AYP) goals measured by students' performance on standardized tests (Hourigan, 2011). If a school failed to meet its AYP goal, parents had the option of sending their children to other schools, including charter schools, secular and religious private schools, and for-profit schools. NCLB provided for this "parental choice" through a "voucherlike transfer of funds" (Chapman, 2007, p. 27) that siphoned money away from public schools.

The Arts as Collateral Damage. The emphasis on test scores and very real consequences for not meeting AYP goals resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum. The academic focus was squarely on the tested subjects of reading and math. Where professional development once focused on instructional practice, teachers now sat through inservice days and trainings dedicated to the improvement of reading and math test scores. Untested subject areas, including arts, were substantially reduced or completely eliminated in favor of remedial math and reading classes (Hourigan, 2011). By 2004, the Council for Basic Education (von Zastrow

& von Zastrow, 2004) reported that instruction in the arts, social studies, and world languages had been dramatically scaled back so that more instructional time could be spent on reading and math (Brewer, 2005; Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010). Throughout the United States, arts education was reduced to being "perceived and funded as a before and afterschool, weekend, and summertime enrichment activity" (Brewer, 2005, p. 21). The arts, a core subject under Goals 2000, were once again marginalized and, in some schools, cut entirely.

This unintended consequence of NCLB was so alarming that Secretary of Education Rod Paige sent a letter to superintendents across the country, in which he implored the administrators not to cut arts education programs in their districts (Paige, 2004; National Arts Education Association, 2004). "The arts, perhaps more than any other subject, help students to understand themselves and others" and "are an important part of a complete education," Paige (2004) wrote (p. 1). However, Paige qualified his support for arts education: Citing a 1988 longitudinal study at the University of California Los Angeles, he added, "students who were highly involved in arts instruction earned better grades and performed better on standardized tests" (p. 1). Paige's qualified support preserved the arts' presence in schools but did nothing to validate the importance of the arts beyond being a means of improving students' scores on standardized tests. The message was clear: Without that connection to student achievement outcomes, the arts have no place in public schools.

Race to the Top

After President Barack Obama took office in 2009, many educators had high hopes that the new administration would enact change to educational legislation (Knight, 2009; Grey, 2010). Arts educators, in particular, hoped that the arts would once again be recognized as a core subject (Grey, 2010).

In 2009, President Obama announced Race to the Top (RTTT), a public education initiative designed to ameliorate certain aspects of NCLB. However, despite being touted as a reform, RTTT made few changes to NCLB. The one distinct difference was that, instead of taking punitive measures against schools with low test scores, states and local school districts would compete for federal grants awarded for high performance and successful reform (Hourigan, 2011). This was marketed to the American public as positive reinforcement, but in practice, RTTT did nothing to alleviate pressure placed on classroom teachers. Standardized testing remained the one measure of student progress, so schools continued to focus instruction on reading and math while sidelining untested subjects, including the arts (Hourigan, 2014).

On top of pressure to raise test scores, RTTT brought a new stress to education with the added components of attaching teacher evaluations to students' test scores and rewarding teachers of high-performing students with performance pay (Hourigan, 2011). The Department of Education's performance pay program, the Teacher Incentive Fund, would "reward teachers and principals for increases in student achievement and boost the number of effective educators working with poor, minority, and disadvantaged students and teaching hard-to-staff subjects" (United States Department of Education, 2009), even though standardized test scores have been shown not to be a valid method of teacher evaluation (Kohn, 2000).

Common Core

NCLB expired in 2014. When the 2013-2014 school year ended, it closed the door on an era of high-stakes testing under NCLB that many educators regarded as an educational Dark Ages, a generation of students whose education was characterized by an emphasis on basic skills, preparation for standardized tests, and an environment in which accountability ratings seem to

matter more than actual learning and are “a public display of judgment” as to the quality of schools and teachers (Foote, 2007).

The following school year opened with the Common Core Standards directing curriculum. When Common Core was first announced, there was considerable buzz in California about performance task assessments having a renaissance, even possibly being used in lieu of high stakes tests for accountability ratings. This news is exciting to educators, because embracing performance task assessments would shift the focus to where it belongs: Student achievement – measurable learning growth – and performance – how well students execute what they have learned (Gettone & Perry, 2011).

The Common Core Standards were organized by identifying desired 12th grade achievement outcomes and working backward through the grade levels to map how these outcomes would be reached, beginning in kindergarten. In addition to specifying content standards for each grade level and academic area, the Common Core Standards provided performance standards on which student achievement would be measured. While the logical structure of the Common Core was encouraging to many teachers, the true source of their hope lay in the possibility that performance task assessments would be used to measure student achievement instead of the traditional pencil-and-paper tests that been used previously. (Gettone & Perry, 2011).

While Common Core specified learning outcomes for students, how the standards would be implemented was left to individual states and school districts. As a result, Common Core implementation and the shift from content knowledge- and skill-based instruction and assessment to performance task-driven assessment were presented to teachers and approached

pedagogically in different ways. As corporations offered solutions for implementation to educational organizations, a neoliberal orientation emerged in these efforts.

Common Core and the Arts. Common Core replaced NCLB's math and reading standards but presented no defined direction for arts education at the national level (May & Brenner, 2016). Wexler (2014) found some aspects of the Common Core concerning in relation to the arts. She noted that David Coleman, "a prominent architect of CCSS and the recently appointed president of the College Board" (p. 173), regarded art as something that can be read and analyzed in the same way as one analyzes text. He believed that students can use art as a way of analyzing and supporting claims. Coleman also praised the standards for recommending "magnificent works of art" (p. 174), an elitist assumption that raises questions about what makes a work of art "magnificent," who decides the criteria for selection and chooses the magnificent works, and will non-Western works of art and art forms associated with non-mainstream or marginalized populations be considered for inclusion.

An examination of the Common Core language arts (ELA) standards corroborated the Wexler (2014) article. The only mentions of any art forms in the Common Core ELA standards is in the context of using visual arts (specifically paintings) as evidence to support an argument, illustrating research with photographs, and adding music to a presentation to enhance mood. Drama receives more attention than visual arts or music in the ELA standards, but only because the standards encourage students to read drama as literature, specifically "the timeless dramas of Shakespeare" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Arts are absent from the math standards.

To find the arts in the Common Core, one must look beyond the released standards to the work that state departments of education and national movements are doing to develop and establish arts standards.

National Coalition for Core Arts Standards. The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) endeavored to conceptualize and develop special core arts standards "to place the arts in the curriculum beyond their 'integration' into ELA and mathematics (p. 2), with the ultimate goal of developing students' comprehensive artistic literacy. A coalition of educators, academics, professionals from several artistic disciplines, and partnership organizations such as the National Art Education Association, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Lincoln Center Education (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, n.d.), the NCCAS developed comprehensive arts standards and, in 2013, released the National Core Arts Standards to be considered for national adoption (Wexler, 2014).

The National Core Arts Standards are organized in a similar manner to the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math. The arts standards focus on five artistic disciplines: Dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, n.d.). Anchor standards for each discipline focus upon four artistic processes (creating, performing/presenting/producing, responding, and connecting; the "responding" and "connecting" processes address art aesthetics and appreciation).

The NCCAS created a framework for each discipline that covers kindergarten through grade 12. In elementary and middle school, students are exposed to the arts in general and explore multiple art forms. Once students enter high school, they perhaps choose an area of specialization. Structuring the framework in this manner is significant: Exposure and instruction in arts in the elementary or middle school is critical for students, because unless they come from

families that can afford extracurricular arts instruction, students may not otherwise have any experience or training in the arts. If they do not have an arts background going into high school, the likelihood of their taking arts courses in high school is low. The arts, in this situation, become a form of expression reserved for the privileged. Schools play a key role in bridging this opportunity gap, and the NCCAS address the issues of what a comprehensive arts curriculum should include very thoroughly.

Adoption of these standards is voluntary. They have not been formally adopted on a national level or even by individual states (SEADAE, 2016). Some states have developed their own approaches and standards for arts education.

California CTE Pathways. In 2001, the California State Board of Education adopted the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Content Standards for California Public Schools. These skill-based standards were developed with the philosophy that art was worth learning for art's sake alone, but that fostering creativity in California's students was additionally vital because "the importance of the arts extends into other areas of schooling" (O'Malley et al., 2004, p. v). The 2004 framework is explicit in its orientation, stating "One of our jobs as educators is to nurture our students' creativity and knowledge" (O'Malley, Adams, Kairott, Dowell, Rowland, Sprague, Carr, & Doyle, 2004, p. v).

The CCSS adoption signaled a change in mission for American education: We must prepare all students for college and career readiness so that we can be the best in a global market. With this change in mission came a change in conceptualization of the role of creative disciplines. In 2013, The California State Board of Education adopted the Career Technical Education Standards for California Public Schools (McLean, Ong, Campbell, Zachry, & Weikle, 2013). These new CTE standards have a strong market-orientation. They were designed to align

with the CCSS and "current economic conditions" (McLean et al., 2013, p. 1) and state as their goal, "The revised CTE standards will help CTE programs keep pace with the new economic and educational opportunities in California" (McLean et al., 2013, p. 1). California Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, as quoted on the CTE Pathways poster, stated the standards' goal perhaps more explicitly: "We seek the day when every enterprise in California – public and private – has access to a pool of talent that both attracts the world's leading businesses and hastens the development and success of new ones, creating opportunities for all" (California Department of Education, 2014).

Positioned within the Pathways, the arts did not receive their own sets of standards as they did in 2001. Indeed, there has been no mention at all of what an elementary or middle schools arts program should look like or how one should be structured. Instead, the arts have been included in the CTE standards, labeled as an industry sector – Arts, Media, and Entertainment (California Department of Education, 2017) – and given their own anchor standards and career pathways for grades 7-12.

The arts are rather odd to be included in the CTE industry sectors. Most of the sectors are STEM-related (e.g. Information and communicative technologies, business and finance, engineering and architecture, health science and medical technology, and energy, environment, and utilities), and a few are service-oriented (e.g. Education, child development, and family services; hospitality, tourism, and recreation; and public services). It almost feels as if the arts were lucky to be invited to this proverbial party at all.

While the arts' inclusion in the CTE standards may be considered a victory by educators who desired for the creative disciplines to be acknowledged within the curriculum, it is also problematic for the following reasons.

Strong career orientation. Each specified industry contains several pathways. All of the CTE industry sectors and their related pathways focus on career preparation. The arts pathways are very different than their counterparts from 2001.

In 2001, the arts disciplines with standards were visual arts, dance, theatre, and music. The 2013 CTE arts pathways are: (a) Design, visual, and media arts; (b) performing arts; (c) production and managerial arts; and (d) game design and integration (California Department of Education, 2014). These pathways indicate a strong shift to technology- and career-orientation, as the new game design and integration pathway would have been part of computer science standards in the past. Additionally, each specific pathway has a clearly stated list of related fields in which students can find jobs (e.g. artistic director or museum curator for the design, visual, and media arts pathway; music arranger or voiceover artist for performing arts; television/film producer or broadcast technician for production and managerial arts; animator or game developer for game design and integration) (State of California Department of Education, 2014).

While talking to students about their futures is important – and certainly something that teachers do throughout K-12 education – there is something rather sinister in the strong career and technical orientation of the new CTE arts standards. Few of the career examples given in the pathway descriptions represent entry-level positions that would be even remotely possible for students right out of high school. Nearly all of the listed career possibilities require, at minimum, a Bachelor's degree and internship experiences. It is irresponsible to imply to students that the arts training they receive in high school will prepare them for working at the higher level jobs listed once they graduate.

Art as Product: Marketability Determines Value. Even more troubling is the overall attitude that the CTE standards demonstrate toward the arts: Art's value is quantified by its

marketability. Throughout centuries, the arts have traced a pathway, but not the kind laid forth by the CTE standards. Arts trace the pathway of our human history: What we valued, what we found abhorrent, what we praised and what we criticized, what we found beautiful. Our triumphs and struggles and times of lost hope. Our family ties. How we lived. It is discouraging is to see the important role that the arts fill in our world reduced to a product whose value is based on marketability.

California Arts Standards. On January 9, 2019, California adopted arts standards (California Department of Education, 2019) based upon those delineated by NCCAS (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, n.d.). While the arts were still included within the CTE Pathways, the adoption of the NCCAS model of arts standards signaled a commitment by the state to comprehensive arts education throughout TK-12 and the valuing of art as process within the curriculum.

Narrowing and Standardization of Education

One of the effects of accountability culture was the narrowing of educational aims (Johnston-Parsons, 2010) and curriculum (von Zastrow & von Zastrow, 2004; Oberg, 2008; Tung, 2010). This narrowing has become characteristic throughout education, affecting what content is presented, instructional design, classroom instructional practices, and teacher morale and sense of professionalism (Tung, 2010). This account of how narrowing and standardization are both products and sustaining factors of the system of no are crucial to understanding the educational environment in which the Las Colinas teachers established the creative community. The standards movement and accountability culture form the background for this scene; the

effects of narrowing and standardization are the details of the teachers' everyday professional lives.

This section will examine education's narrowing and standardization from the perspective of classroom teachers. First, the effects of accountability culture on curriculum and instruction during the NCLB era will be reviewed, followed by a discussion of how approaches to curriculum and instruction were adapted, not changed, with the implementation of Common Core. An account of how teacher communication and collaboration have been narrowed and standardized will follow.

NCLB: Diminishing a Profession in Pursuit of High Test Scores

The standards and high stakes testing of the accountability movement during the NCLB era led to major changes in how schools approached curriculum and instruction. Some districts tightened their structures and issued top-down mandates in response to accountability measures and community expectations during the NCLB era, leading to a standardization of curriculum and instructional practices.

This standardization could be extreme. When the Las Colinas Junior High School faculty visited another junior high in the Arroyo Seco district during a staff development day, the English teachers told the Las Colinas teachers that they no longer taught novels or used the district-adopted textbook at all. Instead, they showed the teachers a binder, one for each student, that contained one lesson after another on specific skills listed in the California State Content Standards. Each lesson was dated. Teachers were expected to be on the same page on any given day. The principal, who had developed and mandated the binder program in several core subject areas at his school, claimed that this method of instruction would raise test scores and urged other principals in the district to adopt the program. The English teachers were miserable but felt

that they could not share their feelings or ideas with their administration. They said they did not feel like they were teachers anymore. There was no craft, no planning or collaboration, no creativity, and no developing lessons to best meet the students' needs. The professional environment at this school closely resembled Henry Giroux's (2011) bleak picture of an education system in which "teachers are reduced to a subaltern class of technicians; and students are positioned as mere recipients of the worst form of banking education" (pp. 11-12).

Common Core Prompts Shifts in Focus

The implementation of Common Core brought a shift from content knowledge- and skill-based instruction and assessment to performance task-driven assessment. This shift was infused with market orientation and represented to stakeholders with buzzwords such as *college and career readiness* (Wexler, 2014). The message was clear: Schools prepare the next generation of workers.

How Common Core was implemented was left to states and individual school districts to determine. CCSS focused on performance standards rather than skills, and when implementation began, curriculum for Common Core was still in various stages of development. Many school districts, including Arroyo Seco, looked to soft skills as an instructional approach. Soft skills, such as Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick, 2000), could be practiced and transferred to real life experiences, supporting students in becoming college- and career-ready.

Corporatizing Curriculum: P21

A coalition of educational policy makers and corporations took up the soft skills banner and established the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009), frequently referred to as P21. This coalition adapted Costa and Kallick's (2000) Habits of Mind for an educational system with a strong market orientation. This adaptation included development of a list of "critical-thinking,

analytical, and technology skills, in addition to the 'soft skills' of creativity, collaboration, and communication that some experts argue will be in high demand as the world increasingly shifts to a global, entrepreneurial, and service-based workplace" (p. 1). States were invited to affiliate with P21, and schools were encouraged to integrate P21 learning into their comprehensive academic programming. Some schools made significant changes to their curriculum to align with P21's goals. At present, 21 states have affiliated with P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2018).

Some critics alleged that P21 is no more than an attempt by corporations to gain more influence over education and what takes place in the classroom. P21 member organizations paid $35,000 annual dues to be a part of the coalition, which provided them with networking opportunities, access to federal policymakers and state leaders, and advance information about directions the educational system may be heading. The annual dues were a small price to pay considering the advantage that kind of access offered to companies developing educational products (Sawchuk, 2009).

However, P21 provided educators with little instructional direction. Truly valuable trainings for teachers were few, and much of the professional development is offered by P21 corporation-sponsored consultants was advertorial. One teacher said of a training, "They razzle-dazzle you for two hours at a workshop and say, 'Here are your 30 new computers in your school, have at it'" (Sawchuk, 2009, p. 21).

Teacher-proofing Instructional Design

The implementation of the Common Core renewed interest in the concept of experiential learning. Teachers were called upon to engage students in instructional activities that would develop their critical thinking abilities and soft skills. Arroyo Seco School District encouraged

its teachers to answer this call through the use of project-based learning (PBL) as framed by the Buck Institute for Education (BIE) (2018). At Las Colinas Junior High School, 95% of the faculty attended BIE training in PBL.

PBL engages students in inquiry-driven learning. Students develop guiding questions about a community problem (community can be defined as the classroom, the school, or the greater community), design and execute an investigation about this problem, analyze their findings, and draw research-based conclusions that they share with others. The PBL process allows students to practice higher level thinking skills while applying the skills to real-world problems. BIE posits that this learning strategy allows students to practice the types of behaviors that will make them active participants in society once they reach adulthood, stating that PBL "prepares students for academic, personal, and career success, and readies young people to rise to the challenges of their lives and the world they will inherit" (Buck Institute for Education, 2018, p. What is PBL?). This type of student-centered experiential learning through solving larger community problems has its roots in John Dewey's philosophy of education (Saltmarsh, 2008; Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss, 2015).

PBL holds potential for fostering creativity, critical thinking, development, agency, and voice in both students and teachers. However, the version of PBL that BIE promotes is highly standardized and reverts to the banking model despite purporting to embrace problem-posing and experiential learning. Educators are encouraged to use project-based learning with their students, but the project structures are standardized to guarantee a showcase-ready product and quantifiable outcomes; to plan the projects, teachers fill in blanks on a template. Students may think creatively – within set parameters; students fill in blanks on template to plan and log their

project's process. The message to both teachers and students is, "Innovate! (But don't color outside the lines)."

BIE's standardization of PBL while citing Dewey's influence is ironic. Dewey criticized schools that took a strictly regimented approach to education and whose curricula bore little relevance to students' lived experiences or the world. He believed that environments such as these stymied students' critical thinking abilities, motivation to learn, resilience, and moral development (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936).

Standardizing Communication and Collaboration

Beginning in the NCLB era and continuing today, interactions among educators – both teachers and administrators – have been increasingly structured under the pretense of improving student achievement outcomes and increasing educator professionalism through more effective and productive meetings, improved communication, and increased accountability at individual school sites. Over time, educational scholars and practitioners have developed protocols and programs to assist teachers in analysis of student work and collaboration, but what began as a way of guiding professional reflection evolved into a system for running a school that limits teacher agency, voice, and innovation.

Critical Friend Groups. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) developed critical friend groups (CFGs) to facilitate educators coaching one another through professional development processes. CFGs were a "particular type of a school-based professional community aimed at fostering members' capacities to undertake instructional improvement and schoolwide reform" (Curry, 2008, p. 735). This was accomplished with the use of set discussion protocols through which educators could analyze specific elements of lesson design, student work, or

student achievement outcomes. These protocols structure discussion, facilitate reflection, and promote open communication among CFG participants.

Training for CFG coaches was thorough and intensive, lasting five days. During this time, participants learned all of the protocols involved with CFG facilitation. After the training, the CFG coaches were expected to return to their respective school sites and become CFG leaders to their colleagues.

While CFG protocols were rigid by design in order to facilitate laser focus on specific aspects of student work and to ensure equal opportunities for communication among group members, the model also recognized and deeply valued the human element, placing great emphasis on creating community, building respect and trust, and developing relationships among group members. "Group members are encouraged and supported to challenge one another to adopt practices that foster educational improvement and educational equity within an environment of mutual trust, collaboration, and safety" (Curlette & Granville, 2014, p. 22).

Professional Learning Communities. In the mid-2000s, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) emerged as another way to structure collaboration by teachers with the purpose of analyzing and improving classroom practice (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). PLCs were similar to CFGs in the sense that educators meet in cohort and use set protocols to analyze and discuss student work, "an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). However, PLCs' structure and scope went beyond the confines of immediate groups; PLCs were designed to create a school- or district-wide system that would yield data-driven organizational effectiveness defined by student achievement outcomes (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006).

> "The PLC process is not a program. It cannot be purchased, nor can it be implemented by anyone other than the staff itself. Most importantly, it is ongoing – a continuous, never-ending process of conducting schooling that has a profound impact on the structure and culture of the school and the assumptions and practices of the professionals within it" (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 10).

Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gail Karhanek (2004) also stressed the importance of implementing PLCs with fidelity to the structure, noting that PLCs cannot be successful unless this fidelity is maintained. Throughout the literature, there are examples of situations in which schools deviated from the prescribed PLC structure; scholars acknowledged that different perceptions of the definition of PLCs affected implementation.

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) noted that collaboration means different things to different people:

> "Some school staffs equate the term 'collaboration' with congeniality and focus on building group camaraderie. Other staffs join forces to develop consensus on operational procedures, such as how they will respond to tardiness or supervise recess. Still others organize themselves into committees to oversee different facets of the school's operation, such as discipline, technology, and social climate" (p. 9)

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) recognized that the activities represented in the cited examples can serve important purposes at a school site. However, he said that none of these activities are representative of the PLC model, which he posited facilitates professional and transformational dialogue rather than being mere procedural. Without the formal structure, a collaboration could not be considered a PLC (DuFour et al., 2004; Oberg, 2008). PLCs required

an all-or-nothing approach to implementation; partial implementation would not produce increased student achievement (DuFour et al., 2006).

PLCs and Teachers. PLCs purport to increase teacher voice and agency, but the literature indicated that PLC implementation begins as a mandate from district or school site administration. This can affect buy-in from school faculties who have endured what may feel like an endless stream of mandates, initiatives, and program implementations; "there is a real chance that the teaming effort will be seen as just another mandate and will not be effective" (Oberg, 2008, pp. 119-120).

The effects of PLCs could seem particularly invasive with regard to teachers' instructional freedom and personal instructional practices. Despite a surface assurance that teachers retain their academic freedom within their own classrooms, PLCs required a standardization of curriculum and pacing in order to operate with fidelity to the program (DuFour et al., 2004). An essential component of the program was a regular battery of common assessments that would inform intervention and enrichment programs for students. Although the PLC system, in theory, increases teachers' voices in their educational communities – and, in some cases, are successful in doing so (Oberg, 2008) – PLCs are still a top-down mandate imposed upon teachers. PLCs require that teachers conform to their structure, and administrators are asked to intervene if individual teachers resist participating (DuFour, 2014).

Conclusion

In education's system of no, teacher voice and agency are restricted. The content teachers teach is dictated by standards, while their pedagogical freedom is stymied by standardized lesson structures promoted by corporate entities who have gained a solid foothold

in education as industry. Even teacher collaboration and collegiality have been standardized through the use of rigid systems such as PLCs that, by design, are top-down in implementation, limit teachers' voices and their audiences to peers, and discourage deviation from the protocols.

The literature frequently argues both sides of the proverbial coin with regard to standardization and narrowing of education, particularly with regard to PLCs, PBL, and P21. Ample literature supports the effectiveness of PLCs and PBL with regard to student achievement outcomes and school improvement. On the other hand, the literature indicates that standardization and narrowing of education have a negative influence on teachers' personal and professional experiences as educators, how they perceive themselves as educators, and possibly their personal educational philosophies, even while the teachers acknowledge that the standardized structures yield positive results.

Yes, the standardized methods can be effective. But must teacher freedom and innovation be sacrificed in order for pedagogy to be effective? What happens when teachers, like the creative community cohort at Las Colinas Junior High School, create their own place of yes within the system of no, and in doing so, deconstruct systems which have been imposed upon them and build one based on local educational values, teachers' personal strengths, and students' interest?

Section II: Theoretical Frameworks

The following section explains the theories that framed this study: Deweyan philosophy of education, Freirean work, and engaged pedagogy.

Deweyan Philosophy of Education

John Dewey (1915) felt that the structure of conventional schools was antithetical to students' natures. He posited that children are naturally curious and are motivated to investigate and learn and that the education system contemporary to his time was structured in a way that squelched this natural curiosity, disregarded students' developmental needs, and focused on short-term results rather than "foster an individuality capable of an enduring resistance and of creative activities" (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 15). In these conventional schools, "the strong urge to investigate, present in every individual, is often crushed by the memorizing of great masses of information useless to him, or the learning of skills that he is told may be useful to him in the far-away future, the sometime, and the somewhere" (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 22). Dewey described students' passive progression through this unnatural, oppressive school system as "a wide made-easy way of schooling into a dead level of mediocrity" (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 22).

> Another shortcoming of traditional education, according to Dewey (1938a) is that it "imposes adult standards, subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity. The gap is so great that the required subject-matter, the methods of learning and of behaving are foreign to the existing capacities of the young. They are beyond the reach of the experience the young learners already possess" (p. 19).

"To attempt to force a previously packaged adult mind upon a child – even in the unfortunate but fortunately unlikely case it was successful – does not lead to an enthusiastic spirit of learning. Indeed, the opposite is the case: the child learns to dislike learning or, at least, in-school learning" (Simpson & Jackson, 2003, p. 27).

Furthermore, the imposition of curriculum marginalizes students as it discounts their experiences, focusing instead on "what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders" (Dewey, 1938a, p. 19). The result of this discounting of student experience is that students are relegated to a passive role in their education. "The gulf between the mature or adult products and the experience and abilities of the young is so wide that the very situation forbids much active participation by pupils in the development of what is taught" (p. 19).

The Role of Experience

"Dewey understood that one's life and thinking were shaped by early experiences, and he developed a concept of experience as an ongoing interaction and transaction in and with the environment that became central to his views of teaching and philosophy" (Simpson & Stack, 2010, Kindle Locations 67-68). Education, Dewey believed, is most effective when students' own experiences both in and out of school are respected, valued, and used as catalysts and resources for student learning, for "it is through what we do in and with the world that we read its meaning and measure its value" (Dewey, 1899, p. mw.1.13). An educational system that allows students to learn experientially engages students fully in their learning as well as prepares students to be productive, contributing citizens in a democratic society:

> "Education that associates learning with doing will replace the passive education of imparting the learning of others. However well the latter is adapted to feudal societies, in which most individuals are expected to submit constantly and docilely to the authority of

> superiors, an education which proceeds on this basis is inconsistent with a democratic society where initiative and independence are the rule and where every citizen is supposed to take part in the conduct of affairs of common interest" (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 120).

Here, Dewey's thoughts reflect criticism of the one-size-fits-all approach of No Child Left Behind. As described in the previous chapter, the implementation of Common Core-aligned programs and frameworks (e.g. P21, project-based learning) purported to increase students' engagement in their education and prepare them for participation and engagement in their communities and American society. These programs certainly appear to be in the spirit of Dewey's words, "School introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction" (Dewey, 1899, p. mw.1.20). They share Dewey's goal for education: A place that prepares students to be active members of "a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious" (p. mw.1.20).

However, despite these lofty aspirations, the aforementioned programs, in reality, are limited depending on a school's priorities and values, as well as the willingness of administration and faculty to take action. Consider how both the school's priorities and faculty's willingness affected experience at Las Colinas Junior High School: When the principal proposed the creation of a STEM magnet school, teachers reacted with alarm. For many of them, this worry was more out of concern for their own job security rather than for the students' experiences. Other teachers, though, were concerned that prioritizing STEM would affect the school's ability to provide appropriate experiences for all students; it was felt that students who were drawn to

creative disciplines – visual, performing, and media arts – would be marginalized by a STEM magnet school's course offerings, and they would lose exposure to creative experiences.

From a Deweyan perspective, the marginalization of creative electives posed greater calamities beyond the risk of losing exposure to creative disciplines at school: The restricted experience can impede students' development as human beings. Eisner (1981) contended that "What people become is largely a function of what they have an opportunity to experience. In this sense, our minds are products of the kinds of tools that are made available to us during maturation" (p. 466). Without access to experiences, students might not have the chance to exercise their full potential for thought. If this occurs, what potential might be lost, and what becoming are we withholding from our students?

The creative community teachers established the community to circumvent dominant structures within the school and offer creative experiences to students who may not otherwise have the opportunity to engage in a creative manner.

Limitations of Experience

While Dewey (1938a) promoted the idea that genuine education came from experience, he noted that not "all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other" (p. 25); the quality of an experience can determine its educative validity. "The quality of any experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. The first is obvious and easy to judge" (p. 27). Because all experiences influence future experiences (Dewey, 1934, 1938a), "the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences"

(Dewey, 1938a, p. 27-18). In other words, a teacher must design educational experiences that engage students and will facilitate meaningful future experiences.

The teachers participating in the creative community did so with the goal of providing meaningful creative experiences for students, particularly students whose creative needs were not being met within the school's existing curricular and extracurricular program. The purpose of the students' projects is not merely to make art – art for art's sake. The teachers have created a framework within which the students brainstorm, develop, and execute their works, then reflect on their process and acquired learning capacities. This model is vastly different than anything that has been previously done at Las Colinas.

Fostering Professionalism Among Educators

> "You and I know, we all know, how much time, effort and energy are spent in attempting to develop a professional spirit among teachers. We all know that it is said over and over, and truly said, that if we could achieve a thoroughly professional spirit, permeating the entire corps of teachers and educators, we should have done more to forward the cause of education than can be achieved in any other way." (Dewey, 1913, p. 114)

Dewey was right that a great deal of effort goes into developing a professional spirit among educators. Yet these attempts to generate professionalism and collegiality among teachers are undermined by a form of societal gaslighting. Contemporary news coverage of education focuses on "failing schools" and what can be done to fix them. The media and the American public speak of teachers with patronizing hagiographic reverence, but they are also quick to lay blame for unsatisfactory school performance at teachers' collective feet.

Dewey (1938b) recognized the load placed upon teachers and lamented the effects it had:

> "One of the most depressing phases of the vocation is the number of care-worn teachers one sees, with anxiety depicted on the lines of their faces, reflected in their strained high pitched voices and sharp manners. While contact with the young is a privilege for some temperaments, it is a tax on others, and a tax which they do not bear up under very well. And in some schools, there are too many pupils to a teacher, too many subjects to teach, and adjustments to pupils are made in a mechanical rather than a human way. Human nature reacts against such unnatural conditions." (Simpson & Stack, 2010, Kindle Locations 486-489).

The professional load, described by Dewey, was certainly a factor that affected teachers' participation in the creative community. In the first year of implementation, two teachers expressed interest and support for the community but did not, themselves, wish to participate. Both teachers cited the heavy time and energy demands of their respective curricular programs as the primary reason for declining to participate. They did not feel they could add an additional responsibility, despite the creative community's low-impact design.

Simpson and Stack (2010) wrote that Dewey implied that "schools and districts and their leaders need to show respect for the ideas and experiences of teachers if schools are to become more than places of mechanical routine" (Kindle Locations 290-291). They wrote that Dewey:

> "…was unwavering in his belief that well-educated, reflective, professional teachers should have a voice in the direction of their own school work and in the preparation of future teachers. When teachers have the power to create learning conditions and to select subject matter based on the developing needs and interests of students, it serves the broader purposes of education, which include nurturing students to become reflective

thinkers and informed participants in democratic classrooms and societies." (Kindle Locations 267-269)

This empowering of teachers may be the biggest challenge to enacting teacher-driven reform. Oberg (2008) noted that empowering teachers professionally requires that administrators be willing to approach school leadership in ways that may be significantly different than the way they are accustomed. Administrators must be willing to relinquish a level of control, to become observers rather than facilitators. They must trust teachers' professionalism and give them room to use their expertise to guide decision-making and pedagogy. In doing so, administrators may release "what they perceive as their right to power by position, but their system will ultimately benefit beyond what any one principal could do on their own" (p. 133).

The teachers in my study were given power by their site administrators to shape and guide fluid learning conditions according to the students' interests and needs. The work generated by the creative community, developed by the teachers and students, was purely organic: It was not mandated by curriculum nor imposed upon the teachers or students by district or site level administrators. It was not connected to any class, and it was not graded. How teachers' attitudes toward their innovation might have changed if the administration moved to formalize or expand it was unknown.

Freirean Work

Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) is an epistemological approach to research and educational practice which examines power structures through a critical lens to identify systemic oppression. Upon identifying this oppression, marginalized people attain *conscientização*

– critical consciousness – which "leads the way to expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation" (p. 35). Empowered with this *conscientização* and the voice and agency that accompany this new consciousness, people take action against systemic oppression, engaging in cycles of action and reflection – *praxis* – with the goal of replacing authoritarian systems with democratic ones. Freire believed that reaching *conscientização* and then engaging in constant cycles of praxis could be transformative, a "practice of freedom" (Freire, 1976; title) "by which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Ross, 2018).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (1970) described dominant pedagogies as a *banking concept* in which:

> The teacher gives a lecture, the students listen to the teacher; the teacher knows everything, the students know nothing; the teacher thinks and the students think about what the teacher thinks; the teacher disciplines, and the students are disciplined; the teacher chooses and imposes the choice on the students, and the students comply; the teacher acts, and the students act through the action of the teacher; the teacher chooses the teaching content, and the students unquestioningly accept it; the teacher exercises authority; the teacher is the subject and the students the object in the process of learning. The 'banking concept' involves the process of transmission, where teachers transfer the knowledge they possess to students in any way they want. (Petrović, Jovanović, & Jovanović , 2012; p. 38).

There is no humanity in the banking model of education – Freire (1970) posits that this model is dehumanizing and turns people into objects by taking away their agency – yet so many

current instructional practices can be recognized in that description. As seen earlier in this chapter, this dehumanized approach to education extends to the positioning and inservicing of teachers as well. Protocols for professional development, such as the Critical Friends Groups and professional learning communities are highly scripted and do not leave much room, if any, for teacher voice or innovation.

Freire's (1970) humanistic approach to education reverses the positions of students and teachers. Students and teachers become partners in learning, with teachers supporting students as they become active participants engaging in a student-driven and -centered learning process defined by problem-posing, inquiry, and finding answers for themselves. In this model, teachers provide some knowledge as scaffolding for students, but this information is given to help students pose their own questions, seek additional information on their own, and engage in independent critical thinking.

The Las Colinas creative community similarly switched the roles of students and teachers by placing the students in the lead position: Participating students determined what they want to learn and design their own path of exploration, while participating teachers functioned as mentors, supporting the students and posing questions for deeper inquiry as they traveled the learning path together. The creative community model humanized the educational experience for students in keeping with Freirean theory. Could this model also humanize the experience for the teacher mentors, even as they taught within the larger system – the system of no – which perpetuates the banking concept model?

Engaged Pedagogy

Engaged pedagogy, developed as an extension of Freire's critical pedagogy, applies Freire's theory to the American education system (hooks, 1994). Engaged pedagogy moves education beyond the deficit-model of Shor's (1992) *zero paradigm* by acknowledging that teachers and students both possess knowledge, experiences, and ways of expression that can help or hinder learning. Engaged pedagogy values this complexity uses it as a foundation on which teachers and students mutually generate a dynamic community of practice that adjusts to the needs of its learners – a "zone of transformation where the cultures of students and teachers meet," (p. 203) a place to "begin transforming their alienation from each other." (p. 203)

hooks (1994) wrote:

> "…it was Freire's insistence that education could be the practice of freedom that encouraged me to create strategies for what he called 'conscientization' in the classroom. Translating that term to critical awareness and engagement, I entered the classrooms with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer." (p. 14)

What distinguishes engaged pedagogy from Freire's critical pedagogy is that engaged pedagogy operates from a position of intentional equality; teachers and students enter the educational environment on equal footing and mutually cultivate this equality through mutual engagement, mutual vulnerability, and creation of community. Anyone – students *and* teachers – can learn, and anyone who comes to learn possesses knowledge that has value to others and can be shared (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011). Freedom is extant, something to maintain and defend vigorously (hooks, 1994) rather than fight to achieve (Freire, 1970). This freedom opens the door for education to be a location of freedom (hooks, 1994) in which all can "demand of

ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress" (hooks 1994, p. 207), to progress together.

Freire (1998) wrote, "As a teacher, I must open myself to the world of these students with who I share my pedagogical adventure. I must become acquainted with their way of being in the world" (p. 122). Engaged pedagogy (Shor, 1992; hooks, 1994) takes Freire's words to heart and posits that the best learning environment is one in which teachers meet their students where they are, genuinely care for these students, and teach them in a way that respects their individual epistemologies:

> "To educate as a practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin." (hook, 1994, p. 13)

Creating community is one of these necessary conditions, as it binds teachers and students together with a common purpose. hooks (1994) wrote:

> "Working with a critical pedagogy based on my understanding of Freire's teaching, I enter the classroom with the assumption that we must build 'community' in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor… I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us. What

we all ideally share is the desire to learn – to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world." (p. 40)

Crucial to the creation of community is the concept of mutual vulnerability. The act of teachers opening themselves to students and allowing themselves to be vulnerable empowers students. hooks (1994) noted that this vulnerability empowers the teachers as well. "Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks." (p. 21)

hooks (1994) acknowledged that this vulnerability and mutual engagement of teachers and students flies in the face of conventional educational structures that promote and support compartmentalization of teachers' and students' lives. "This support reinforces the dualistic separation of public and private, encouraging teachers and students to see no connection between life practices, habits of being, and the roles of professors" (p. 16). We see this currently in schools as the implementation of highly structured educational programs and systems that imitate business models perpetuate teacher isolation and confirm the split between the personal and professional.

Involvement in the Las Colinas creative community requires teachers to make themselves vulnerable to an audience that may be more intimidating than their students: Their colleagues. hooks (1994) recognized that engaged pedagogy asks a lot of teachers and that the challenge to step out of one's comfort zone and open oneself to students – or one's colleagues – can be an uncomfortable one. She acknowledged that paradigm shifts, such as that which engaged pedagogy requests, are difficult but necessary. The teachers in Las Colinas Junior High School's creative community were at different levels of comfort with regard to the creative community.

Some of the teachers had collaborated together or with other teachers in the past. For others, collaboration was a completely new concept – they were used to working in isolation.

Limitations

In a critique of critical pedagogy, Ellsworth (1989) raised concern that critical pedagogy did not alleviate issues of power balance in the classroom, that "strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact" (p. 306). This statement could also be applied to educators and the standardization of education today: Even when teachers are granted freedom to explore their pedagogy and innovate, they are still subject to the dominant authoritarian structure of the education system.

Florence (1998) contextualized this concern in the education system's accountability culture: "Even when school boards and parents 'allow' for 'deviations' in the standard curriculum and teaching methods, the underlying expectations are that these have no adverse effect on students' achievement scores" (p. 136). Las Colinas' creative community could very well be considered one of these "deviations." The students in the community were not graded for their participations nor the projects they create; there were no attachments to any class. Could it be that the community was allowed to exist because it does not take away from instructional time on tested subjects? Or was the community allowed to continue because administrators believed that there is value in the work the teachers and students were doing? Or perhaps the administrators saw potential in these works for increasing students' outcomes and the school's accountability dashboard?

Chapter 3: Methodology and Design

Arts-based research methodologies are approaches to scholarly inquiry that systematically utilize "the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29), as a tool in "all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation" (Leavy, 2015, p. 4). An arts-based approach allows researchers to examine situations and issues in a deep, textured, and highly aesthetic manner (McNiff, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Osei-Kofi, 2013).

Throughout this study, I utilized arts-based research methodologies in my data collection, analysis, and dissemination. This chapter is an overview of this research paradigm, its methodologies, their use, and their place within the academy, as well as a brief overview of narrative, poetic, and visual inquiry, which I used for collection, analysis, and representation of my data throughout the research process.

Overview of Arts-based Research Methodologies

Arts-based research is "an approach to research that exploits the capacities of expressive form to capture qualities of life that impact what we know and how we live" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 5). This scholarly research methodology employs artistic practices as tools in the process of inquiry. These tools may be used in a holistic approach to inquiry across the disciplines and at any phase of the research process, including question generation, data collection, content generation, analysis, and dissemination, also called representation (Leavy, 2015; 2018a).

Leavy (2018a) wrote that arts-based research approaches inquiry with the following epistemological assumptions:

1. Art can reveal truths;
2. Art can generate and communicate meaning;
3. Art can be revelatory and facilitate achievement of self-other knowledge; and
4. There exist multiple ways of knowing (e.g. preverbal, sensory, kinesthetic)

Arts-informed research vs. Arts-based research

Not all research that utilizes art is arts-based research. McNiff (2008) noted that, in some research activities, "the arts may play a significant role but are essentially used as data for investigations that take place within academic disciplines that utilize more traditional scientific, verbal, and mathematic descriptions and analyses of phenomena" (p. 29). These types of research activities are known as *arts-informed research,* "a way of representing research work that nevertheless remains firmly rooted in qualitative methods" (Rolling, 2010, p. 105). What distinguishes arts-based research methodologies from these research activities is that, in arts-based methodologies, the arts are the "primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29).

Subcategories of arts-based research

Elliott Eisner (2008) posited that arts-based research has its own subcategories, of which arts-based educational research is one. Richard Siegesmund (2014) agreed with Eisner, writing that "it is important to note that there can be forms of arts-based research that are not arts-based educational research. Furthermore, all arts-based research conducted by educators is not inherently arts-based educational research" (p. 3). Siegesmund called for researchers to be clear in identifying these "fine-grained distinctions in the methodological framework and research objectives of their work" (p. 3).

Clarification of Terms

There are many terms used to refer to scholarly inquiry that uses the arts as research methodologies and means of dissemination. Some of these terms are *scholartistry*, *a/r/tography*, *artistic inquiry*, *arts-based inquiry*, and *arts-based research*. While these terms are frequently used interchangeably, within the research genre, each of these terms is nuanced and connotes particular methodological approaches or aims of inquiry (Osei-Kofi, 2013).

I have chosen to use the broadest terms within the paradigm in my writing. I will use the term *arts-based research* to refer to the research paradigm. I will use the term *practitioners* when referring to scholars who use arts-based research in their work, and I will use the term *researcher* to refer to a scholar who is engaging in the process of investigation.

History

Qualitative Roots

Arts-based research methodologies are an off-shoot of traditional qualitative inquiry, which was itself an offshoot of quantitative inquiry that developed during the 1920s. Scholars were concerned that quantitative inquiry failed to depict complexities in subjects, so they began to employ qualitative research methods, primarily used by anthropologists, to examine aspects of urbanization that had remained hidden in prior quantitative inquiry. The qualitative methods, particularly ethnography, painted a detailed, in-depth picture of the social aspects of urbanization and gave authentic voice to the studies' participants, generating results that were more detailed and specific than would have been possible with a quantitative study (Leavy, 2015).

The social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s significantly altered the academic landscape. Newly mindful of the oppressive effects of research paradigms on minority groups

and wishing not to perpetuate this marginalization, scholars reexamined the existing paradigms, asked new research questions, reframed previous questions, and experimented with different theoretical and methodological approaches to inquiry. These activities led to expanded use of qualitative inquiry in educational research and a rise in alternative theoretical frameworks. Among these frameworks was postmodernism, a theory which rejects the idea of grand theories for the idea that there are infinite truths which vary depending on individuals' perspectives. Postmodernism opened the door for the use of art in research and practice (Leavy, 2015).

A New Approach

Arts-based research emerged as its own methodological genre in the early 1990s (Leavy, 2015). In 1993, Elliot Eisner convened a group of 25 scholars at Stanford University to discuss "research guided by aesthetic features" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. xi). It was at this event that the term *arts-based research* was first used. Since then, a growing number of scholars have used "a wide range of artistic approaches to collecting, analyzing, and presenting research – including but not limited to the use of readers theatre, collage, painting, music, photography, poetry, narrative writing, and dance – in inquiry" (Osei-Kofi, 2013, pp. 135-136).

Arts-based research and qualitative inquiry differ with regards to what each paradigm values. To clarify these differences between the arts-based and qualitative research paradigms, Leavy (2015) developed the following table (p. 294):

Table 1

Respective values of qualitative and arts-based research paradigms.

Qualitative	Arts-based
Words	Stories, images, sounds, scenes, sensory
Data collection	Data or content generation
Meaning	Evocation
Writing	Re(presenting)
Value laden	Political, consciousness-raising, emancipation
Process	Authenticity
Interpretation	Truthfulness
Persuade	Compel, move, aesthetic power
Transferability	Resonance
Interdisciplinary	Transdisciplinary

Despite the interest in and use of this methodology in scholarly work, arts-based research remains an outsider within the academy. Carl Leggo (C. Leggo, personal communication, December 5, 2016) referred to arts-based scholars as "a network of loners" who are scattered around the world at a limited number of universities. Because their methodologies of choice are not always embraced by other academics, arts-based scholars network and collaborate on a global level to promote this type of inquiry.

Arts-based research exists in community with, not in opposition to, the quantitative and qualitative approaches to inquiry. Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor (2008), citing Eisner (2002), explained, "Every research methodology is a way of seeing the world – and every way of seeing is not seeing" (p. 4). In inquiry, one research method can illuminate aspects of a topic that another method was unable to see at all. The methods complement one another in this way, and we need to view the world through the lens of each in order to see the complete picture.

Advantages of Arts-Based Research

Acknowledging and Embracing Ways of Knowing. Art-based research expands the possibilities for expression of knowledge. Eisner (1981) wrote:

> "It seems to me a strange view of thinking to limit it to verbally or mathematically mediated activity. Such a view implies that painters, composers, athletes, and all others whose medium of expression is nonverbal or nonmathematical first must think in verbal or mathematical forms before they are able to translate them into the qualities and actions that constitute the works they create" (p. 469).

Earlier, Dewey (1934) wrote on this topic, arguing that restriction of the concept of intelligence to mathematical and verbal thinking represented a narrow view and that a deep intelligence belied the ability to communicate ideas through art:

> "Any idea that ignores the necessary role of intelligence in production of works of art is based upon identification of thinking with use of one special kind of material, verbal signs and words. To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. Indeed, since words are easily manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being 'intellectuals.'" (p. 47)

Arts-based research values diverse ways of knowing and embodies an intersubjectivity in which we make meaning through our relationships with others (Conrad & Beck, 2015).

Fullness of Inquiry. Arts-based research provides room for the fullness of inquiry. It recognizes that our lives and our world have more complexity than can be delineated in mere words (Eisner & Barone, 2012). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) call this fullness of inquiry a *rhizome:* "A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes" (p. 6). Bulbs and tubers do not branch out; they grow, contained within the bulb, as their flower sprouts upward. The contents inside of the bulb are interconnected and forge new connections as they develop.

Like the rhizomatic bulb, Leggo (2012a) describes arts-based research as a methodology that "interconnects, interacts, interviews, interweaves" (p. 2) and "renders abundant combinations amidst contiguous borders" (p. 5). Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay (2008) described the rhizome as "an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum" (p. 106), allows the unnamable to reveal itself or be brought to light, and explores the in-between "spaces of art making, researching, and teaching" (p. 106). In other words, the rhizomatic nature of arts-based research, in which information connects and creates new meaning and knowledge, is what

facilitates revelation and investigation of the in-between spaces that would be overlooked in traditional research methodologies: The liminal spaces.

The rhizomatic nature of arts-based research also facilitates the creation of new forms. Each "interaction with old material creates something new, something previously not existing in experience… As a piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains (subject to the ravages of time) self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is esthetically experienced" (Dewey, 1934, p. 113). This speaks to the capability of arts-based research to not just accommodate but embrace unfinishedness, for the process of creating and generating new experiences is neverending, and each time we approach our research, we see it through new eyes, because the knowledge we took from it before has changed us.

The Ability to Access the Liminal. Art reflects our culture and humanity and tells us things about ourselves that we often cannot or are unwilling to verbalize. It transcends barriers, bringing attention and clarity to aspects of our lives and our world that may be oppressed, repressed, ignored, or unnoticed. Dewey (1934) recognized this capability of art when he wrote: "Through art, meanings of objects that are otherwise dumb, inchoate, restricted, and resisted are clarified and concentrated, and not by thought working laboriously upon them, nor by escape into a world of mere sense, but by creation of a new experience" (p. 138).

The ability of art to transcend barriers is beneficial to scholarly inquiry in that it enables researchers to examine liminal aspects of their subjects, such as emotion and experience, that may be inaccessible, misrepresented, or ignored when using the traditional quantitative and qualitative approaches (Leggo, Sinner, Irwin, Pantaleo, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2011; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Irwin, 2013; Manovski, 2014). Irwin (2013) calls this the *in-between,* a place "where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and

knowing through living inquiry" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008b; xxi). This ability to attend to the liminal facilitates deep, textured, holistic inquiry with the potential to connect with its audience in profound and personal ways (Leavy, 2015).

"Art-based methods, making use of a larger spectrum of creative intelligence and communications, generate important information that often feels more accurate, original, and intelligent than more conventional descriptions" (McNiff, 2008, p. 30). The methodology allows stories to be told more completely and in ways that resonate deeply with others (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008), which increases human understanding (Barone & Eisner, 2012). The paradigm's methodologies also reveal and explore aspects of subjects, such as their affective and aesthetic meanings, that cannot be analyzed or expressed through the mainstream paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008). Additionally, the process of representing data through art can yield unanticipated insights (Leavy, 2018a).

Accessibility and Relatability. In education, arts-based inquiry has the potential to bridge the gaps between research and praxis (Barone & Eisner, 2012), "not only broaden the field of research but also broaden our discussions of what needs to be considered in educational opportunities in K-12 schools, our pre-service teaching programs, and the graduate training of researchers" (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 243). If our work is to be taken seriously by those outside the academy, we must be epistemologically humble in our presentation of our research, lest we be seen as inaccessible and lose our audience (Barone, 2008).

Art provides an epistemologically humble way to make our work accessible. Arts-based research offers the potential for public scholarship at its finest and truest; art can engage educational practitioners at all levels, as well as the general public – audiences that scholarly journals rarely, if ever, reach. Dewey (1934) agrees that art is a highly effective communicator,

the only form of "complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience" (p. 109). Arts-based research methods capture and communicate the emotions and sensations that allow the audience to experience the research and make their own meanings through participation (Manovski, 2014).

Accessibility Through the Familiar. A core concept of Dewey's (1934) philosophy of aesthetics is the idea that art is germane to the human experience. Art is everywhere, because true art is not a physical product but a process that takes place within experience generated through the human process of creating and perceiving works of art. This democratic approach to art removes it from elitist venues and positions it in a way that makes it accessible to all people. As people recognize the integration of aesthetic experiences throughout their everyday lives, they also recognize that art does not exist only in particular contexts but is all around us all the time, integrated into the normal everyday experiences of our lives, "prefigured in the very processes of living" (p. 25).

Relatability Through the Common. Dewey (1934) believed that art can communicate, illuminate, and make common the universal elements of the human experience:

> "…Art is the most effective mode of communication that exists. For this reason, the presence of common or general factors in conscious experience is an *effect* of art. Anything in the world, no matter how individual in its own existence is particularly common, as I have said, because it is something that may, just because it is part of the environment, interact with any living being. But it becomes a conscious common possession, or is shared, by means of works of art more than by any other means" (p. 298).

Through art, we realize our shared culture and humanity. Arts-based research reveals these commonalities as well. Arts-based research meets us at these common spaces, then allows us to explore and share the liminalities.

Pushing Boundaries. Arts-based research challenges conventions within the academy, posing questions about what defines knowledge and what type of research is valued. The works of Dewey and Barone suggest that this trait of pushing boundaries is natural, because it accompanies the use of art within the methodology.

Dewey (1934) posited that it was in artists' natures to push boundaries and challenge conventions, and he was critical of artists who did not do that and instead created work within the confines of convention. Dewey likened these artists to cannibals who consume and regurgitate the same tired ideas; he believed that creating within conventional limitations afforded no growth and led to stagnation. The artists' perceptions were forced "into channels previously worn into ruts," the wings of their imaginations clipped (p. 198).

As challenging convention was in artists' natures, Dewey (1934) believed that pushing boundaries and challenging convention were particular functions – duties, even – of art. He wrote:

> "Refusal to acknowledge the boundaries set by convention is the source of frequent denunciations of objects of art as immoral. But one of the functions of art is precisely to sap the moralistic timidity that causes the mind to shy away from some materials and refuse to admit them into the clear and purifying light of perceptive consciousness" (p. 197).

Barone (2008) also spoke of the potential of arts-based research to push boundaries and challenge convention:

> "When an arts-based work engenders an aesthetic experience in its readers or viewers, empathy may be established, connections made, perceptions altered, emotions touched, equilibria disturbed, the status quo rendered questionable… In these conversations, ideas and ideals may be shared for the purposes of an improved reality. Plots may be hatched against inadequate present conditions in favor of more emancipatory social arrangements in the future." (p. 39)

The ability of arts-based research to push boundaries, challenge conventional ways of thinking and presenting data, and open fora for dialogue makes it particularly approach to use in critical contexts. Arts-based studies "unsettle stereotypes, challenge dominant ideologies, and include marginalized voices and perspectives… (Arts-based research) can be configured inclusively and has the potential to jar people into seeing and thinking differently" (Leavy, 2018a, p. 10).

Criticism and Defense

"It should be expected that an approach to research that employs new assumptions and methods and has a short history should generate tensions" (Eisner, 2008, p. 17). And truly, arts-based research has. Some tensions have been at the center of criticism levied toward the paradigm. Discussion and careful consideration of these tensions can address criticism and make an arts-based inquiry stronger.

Criticism

A question of rigor. Arts-based research may not be perceived as a rigorous research methodology because of the strong aesthetic component and the lack of empirical or anecdotal data. Dewey (1934) defended the rigor of the artistic process, citing arts as "the greatest

intellectual achievement in the history of humanity" (p. 26). He further illustrated the rigor of the arts by likening a painter's act of creation to the exacting work of scientists:

> "…the idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd. A painter must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing and where his work is going. Moreover, he has to see each particular connection of doing and undergoing in relation to the whole that he desires to produce. To apprehend such relations is to think, and is one of the most exacting modes of thought." (p. 47)

Evaluation of arts-based research can confirm rigor of a study. This will be discussed later in this paper.

Academic hegemony. The relatively newness of arts-based methodologies has caused it is somewhat of an outsider within the world of scholarly research. This is partly due to individuals' philosophies about the nature of research and knowledge and the purpose of doctoral study, and partly due to a general lack of familiarity with the methodology among academics (Eisner 2008).

Eisner (2008) recounted an anecdote that demonstrates how personal philosophies can affect attitudes toward arts-based methodologies. At AERA, Eisner debated with Howard Gardner about whether a novel could stand as a doctoral dissertation. Gardner did not believe so; he felt that "doctoral training was essentially that, a training program designed to prepare skilled journeymen in the use of conventional research methods" (p. 18). Eisner countered that "universities ought to be places in which doctoral students could explore imaginatively new methods and concepts and if universities could not provide such a setting, there were few places that could" (p. 18). Gardner's view represents a hegemonic philosophy that privileges certain

types of knowledge and research skill over others. Eisner's view embraces the idea that exploring alternative ways of knowing can lead to new methods and new knowledge.

Eisner (2008) believed that lack of familiarity with the methodologies were a primary reason for the paradigm's marginalization within the academy, and he felt, as I do, that as more arts-based work is published and academics become more familiar with the methodologies, arts-based research will attain greater stature within the academy. "Deeds, not words, may be in the end the most persuasive source of support and the source that yields the highest levels of credibility" (p. 19).

Tensions in Arts-Based Research

Eisner (2008) elaborated on five tensions within the arts-based research paradigm, discussing them as follows.

Imaginative vs. Referentially Clear. Eisner's (2008) tension is a challenge to generate a product that demonstrates creative, innovative thought while simultaneously and clearly communicating its message, to find a balance between the creative work and the clarity of its meaning. Researchers must be cognizant of whether their creative product is too abstract for the message to come through or too literal for the message to be taken seriously.

In an effort to resolve this tension, the researcher must find the most appropriate media for the study, taking into account both what is appropriate for the guiding questions and participants and what will communicate the research most clearly. This may change during the research process. Not all media will be appropriate for every research topic. Each artistic medium has characteristics that yield aesthetic effects unique to that medium, and because message and medium are connected, a researcher must take care to use a medium that will

maintain the aesthetic effect and allow the intended experience to reach fulfillment (Dewey, 1934).

Arts-based research methodologies allow for this fluidity. Indeed, McNiff (2008) suggested that this fluidity, the need for the design and medium to respond to the subject matter and situation, could define the research genre and its practitioners:

> "Perhaps a defining quality of arts-based researchers is their willingness to start the work with questions and a willingness to design methods in response to the particular situation, as contrasted to the more general contemporary tendency within the human sciences to fit the question into a fixed research method." (33-34).

Leavy (2017) also wrote that art-based research "follows a generative and emergent process, open to the unexpected— to surprises, new insights, and bends in the road. So even when we have a plan for how a particular inquiry will proceed, in practice, it can and often ought to be a messy process" (p. 191). The fluidity of arts-based research process may seem to make clarity difficult to achieve. However, this fluidity actually allows space for a researcher to adjust an art product during its creation to maximize clarity. If a researcher feels that abstraction is vital to the research product, he or she may curate a guide or another form of explanation for the audience that will ensure clarity.

Particular vs. General. As researchers examine the in-between spaces through their inquiry, they face the challenge of capturing the specifics of a situation while keeping their inquiry general enough to have validity. To meet this challenge, researchers may be explicit in identifying connections between the particular of their studies and the general of the bigger picture.

Aesthetics vs. Verisimilitude. The work of an arts-based researcher should have some artistic merit while also having scholarly merit. Arts-based methodologies are a research paradigm – without verisimilitude, a study can become simply an art project inspired by a research question. This tension will be addressed further when discussing the evaluative criterion of generativity.

Better Questions vs. Definitive Answers. This tension is another defining factor that distinguishes arts-based research from quantitative and qualitative methods. Where quantitative and qualitative studies have definitive outcomes that are discussed and, perhaps, researched further or replicated, arts-based studies sometimes have no outcome other than the generation of more questions (Eisner, 2008).

McNiff (2008) notes that, in contrast to quantitative and qualitative traditions, researchers using arts-based methodologies will often begin inquiry guided by questions but without a clear hypothesis of what outcomes may be:

> "The artist might have a sense or intuition of what might be discovered or of what is needed, and in some cases even a conviction, but the defining aspect of knowing through art… is the emanation of meaning through the process of creative expression. (p. 40)

The idea that questions can be acceptable outcomes of a study is a sticking point for some academics, as it challenges their concepts of what academic research is and should accomplish. Dewey (1934) addressed this issue, writing that because we are used to clearly delineated scientific thinking, we tend to apply scientific beliefs to all areas of experience. Experience, however, is diverse; it is, at once, individualized and shared. This quality of experience makes it difficult to apply scientific beliefs to its study. Arts-based research methodologies, on the other hand, provide room to examine the diversity and depth of experience.

The key to questions being acceptable outcomes is that the questions raised should illuminate situations pertaining to the studies and spark deeper further inquiry. If an arts-based inquiry "culminates in little more than a delightful poetic passage or a vivid narrative that does little educational work, it is not serving its function" (Eisner, 2008, p. 23). In other words, as stated previously, an arts-based study should yield more than a question-inspired art project.

Metaphoric Novelty vs. Utility. Arts-based research should yield work that is innovative and creative, but researchers using this approach must bear in mind that, in arts-based methodologies, art is "a vehicle that propels research" (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 240). Arts-based research has the capability of conducting and disseminating research to a wide audience in ways that can be profound and personally meaningful. The novelty of work in this paradigm should not impede its message but rather enhance its capacity to communicate.

Evaluating Arts-Based Research

Barone and Eisner (2012) recognized the problem of evaluating arts-based research: "Given the apparently elusive character of art forms, how will we determine the 'validity' of what an arts-based research project yields? How will we know if it is accurate or inaccurate? Can arts-based research be trusted?" (p. 5).

The evaluation of arts-based research continues to be debated among arts-based practitioners. Leavy (2018b) noted that numerous scholars have proposed assessment criteria, but many of these models can be applied to only one art form or to specific projects.

Barone and Eisner (2012) wrote that "what we seek is not so much validity as it is credibility" (p. 6), and to that end, they developed the following criteria for valuing arts-based research. Their model allowed for evaluation while accommodating diverse art forms and

avoiding standardization. They were clear that their proposed criteria were "a starting point for thinking about the appraisal of works of arts-based research" (p. 155) and that scholars should exercise their own judgement when applying the criteria to evaluate any arts-based scholarly work.

Barone and Eisner's (2012) model uses six criteria to evaluate arts-based research.

Incisiveness

Barone and Eisner (2012) propose that arts-based research should be penetrating and get directly to the heart of meaning, the core of a social issue. The research "does not get swamped with details that have no inherent significance and do little to increase the cogency of the research itself" (p. 148).

Concision

Arts-based research must be concise, to the point, lest the inquiry stray from its purpose and the studied phenomena become confusing. To achieve concision, a researcher must use a controlling insight, a theme, that enables him or her to make judgement calls about what material to include in the study and what to leave out. Both during the inquiry and in the end product, "the theme may only emerge after some degree of immersion within the work; it may not be immediately obvious" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 150), but by omitting any content that does not contribute to the theme, the research is able to stay on track.

Coherence

Barone and Eisner (2012) defined coherence as "the creation of a work of arts-based research whose features hang together as a strong form" (pp. 150-151). Do the components of the research combine in a way that is aesthetically satisfying and harmonious? Does the creation "work?"

Barone and Eisner (2012) wrote, “Part of the business of learning to make forms that hang together is learning how to see and respond to the ones that the individual artist and other artists have made. The same is true in dealing with arts based research” (p. 151). Thus, it is important for arts-based researchers to examine the works of other practitioners, analyze how various components of their works cohere, and consider how this coherence relates the theme of the works.

Generativity

Generativity in arts-based research is defined differently than the generativity in quantitative and qualitative work, although the notions are similar. Barone and Eisner (2012) clarify that “by generativity, we mean the ways in which the work enables one to see or act upon phenomena even though it represents a kind of case study with an n of only 1” (pp. 151-152). In other words, does the research create new knowledge? Does it “have legs?” Can it go somewhere from here?

Siegesmund (2014) echoed Eisner and Barone’s idea of generativity, citing the need for research to “come home to a pragmatic footing” (p. 10):

> “The research has to be more than a compelling tale of the researcher's personal transformation. The research needs to be more than a provocation. The work has to deconstruct and then offer a direction for the reconstruction of the perception of the reader, in an educationally significant way. At a minimum, a work of arts-based educational research needs to suggest a method for working the ruins of deconstruction that will lead to a new perception of practice and policy.” (pp. 10-11)

If arts-based research lacks generativity – the verisimilitude Eisner referenced in his discussion of tensions (Eisner, 2008) – the result is little more than an art project inspired by a research question.

Social significance

Barone and Eisner (2012) explain that the criterion for assessing arts-based research "pertains to the character, meaning, and import of the central ideas of the work… What makes a work significant is its thematic importance, its focus on the issues that make a sizable difference in the lives of people within a society" (p. 153).

Evocation and illumination

Evocation and illumination are what makes arts-based research real, felt, and emotionally tangible. This is an important criterion for valuing, "because it is through evocation and illumination that one begins to *feel* the meanings that the work is to help its readers grasp" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, 153). Illumination is about how a work functions to make those who experience it see a phenomenon in a different light (Conrad & Beck, 2015). It occurs "often through defamiliarizing an object or a process so that it can be seen in a way that is entirely different than a way in which customary modes of perception operate (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 154).

Sharing Stories: Narrative and Poetic Inquiry

People are natural storytellers. Through stories, people recount personal experiences and shared histories, using the narratives to define who they are as individuals, as members of groups, and the relationships within, and to make sense of events and their place in them (Clandinin, Caine, Estefan, Huber, Murphy, & Steeves, 2015). Narrative and poetic inquiry

examine and make meaning from these experiences through storytelling. As these methods share qualities, I shall refer to them in cohort as *storytelling inquiry* for the purposes of this research study.

Rationale for Storytelling Inquiry

Storytelling inquiry has the advantage of being able to isolate particular episodes or moments in a situation, to slow down time to enable the researcher and audience to linger and observe, to distill these episodes and moments to their very essence. This is a very deep form of inquiry that reveals nuances, ideas, and emotions that would only be hinted at in more traditional qualitative inquiry and completely missed in a quantitative study. Storytelling inquiry methods capture participants' voices and emotions, which in turn make a study so relatable that the dissemination of the outcomes can be extremely personal for the audience, a sort of homecoming.

Storytelling inquiry is particularly good at evoking feeling, illuminating issues, and examining the deepest complexities of liminal spaces. Leggo (2012b) wrote, "Life is abundant, and narrative inquiry is a way of focusing on some particulars of that abundance in order to recognize some of the possibilities of meaning that lie always in the seemingly tangled messiness of lived experiences" (p. xiii). Also focusing on meaning-making and illumination, Freeman (2018) wrote that researchers who used this inquiry method "seize upon what exists and imaginatively transform it, through language, so that we, the readers, find ourselves in the position of seeing it in a new light" (p. 132).

"Stories present possibilities for understanding the complex, mysterious, even ineffable experiences that comprise human living" (Leggo, 2012b, p. xix). Storytelling inquiry allows us to spend considerable, detailed time with a participant, to explore deeply the nuances and

subtexts that cannot be seen when using quantitative methods or seen in detail when using qualitative methods. Storytelling inquiry allows us to represent people authentically, “not as taken apart by analytic categories, but as people… composing lives full of richness and complexity, lives with artistic and aesthetic dimensions” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002).

Structuring Storytelling Inquiry

To structure narrative for the context of arts-based research, Clandinin and Huber (2002) developed a three-dimensional inquiry space using Dewey’s (1934) concept of experience. This structure provides "a way to attend more closely to the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of experience” (p. 163).

Clandinin and Huber’s (2002) space has three dimensions:

1. A personal-social dimension (internal and external interactions);
2. A temporal dimension (past, present, and future); and
3. A situational dimension (place).

These three dimensions combine within the narrative to create a structure for analyzing actions, feelings, and words.

The three-dimensional narrative space also grounds storytelling inquiry within the arts-based research paradigm: Art is used as a tool in data analysis and representation. Clandinin and Huber (2002) wrote, “Artistry and aesthetics are both in the lives we are studying and in the doing of narrative inquiry. In our inquiries, we need always to be attentive to narrative as both phenomenon and method” (p. 162).

Visual Inquiry

Painting

Painting is a way of analyzing data in which the researcher interacts with data in a very deep, organic way. Paintings can be created to document or process what is observed during the research process, they can be created in response to experiences as a way of unpacking nuances, and they can be painted "with the intention of bringing clarity of purpose and interpersonal understanding" (Fish, 2018, p. 338) to one's work. As a research methodology, painting can yield insights that cannot be gained in other ways. For me, personally, painting is a kinesthetic way of interacting with my data; the physicality of the act of painting allows me to consider and analyze data in a tangible way

In analysis through painting, consideration of which medium to use, how to represent various parts of participants' stories and the outcomes they shared, and what visual metaphors to use are all noted and documented. In painting analysis, there are no catastrophic mistakes on the canvas. If representation seems "off," that can be remedied, and the solutions make the piece even better than planned as the researcher reevaluates the painting's effectiveness at conveying the participants' stories and determines a different direction.

Research Design and Procedures

Research Setting

Las Colinas Junior High School is a public middle school, serving grades 7-8, located in suburban southern California. It is part of the Arroyo Seco School District. Las Colinas serves a diverse student population of 1,500: Asian, Caucasian, Latino, and multiracial students represent even percentages of demographics; 9% of the student population are English Learners; and

38.5% students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Although the school qualifies for Title I funding, it receives none.

Because of its strong elective program and comprehensive academic program, Las Colinas is known within the Arroyo Seco School District as being a very desirable junior high school, both to attend as a student and at which to teach. Twenty per cent of the school's enrollment is comprised of school-of-choice students and inter-district transfers. Faculty turnover at Las Colinas is low. Fifty-two of the 85 faculty and staff members are classroom teachers. Thirty-three of these teachers have taught at Las Colinas for more than 10 years, and seven have taught at the school for 20 or more years.

Participants

This study shares the stories of a cohort of teachers – Randy, Linnea, Kris, and Wade – who worked at Las Colinas Junior High School and were mentors in the Creative Community. Each teacher was well-established in his or her teaching career, having taught in the classroom between 14 and 25 years. Randy, Linnea, and Wade had worked together at Las Colinas for the previous 14 years; Kris was in her second year at the school, having transferred to the junior high school from a high school within the Arroyo Seco School District. Each teacher had taught in several subject areas; represented subjects among the four teachers were language arts, history, math, science, physical education, performing arts, visual arts, media arts, business, and computer programming. Randy, Linnea, and Wade had collaborated with other teachers or with one another on various projects in the past, so the creative community formalized their partnerships. Kris had collaborated with other science teachers when she participated in a special summer bridge program at a nearby university, but the creative community was her first experience with cross-curricular collaboration with colleagues at her school site.

As this study explored the teachers' experiences in implementation of the creative community, selection criteria for participants were:

1) The participant teachers worked at Las Colinas Junior High School and were actively involved with the creative community;

2) At least half of the participant teachers had been involved with the creative community since its inception and had been consistently involved during all four years of implementation;

3) The participant teachers were interested in sharing their stories and were willing to participate; and

4) There were no identified conflicts of interest or conflicting power dynamics (e.g. being in a supervisory position) between myself and the participant teachers.

Limitations in Sample. While race and socioeconomics were not foci of this study, it is important to note that three of my four participants are white, and all are middle class. This homogeneity is not due to an error in sampling; rather, these participants are an accurate representation of the faculty demographics at Las Colinas Junior High School.

The homogenous demographics of the sample may seem, at first glance, to affect the study's transferability. However, as an arts-based examination of a cohort of teachers participating in an existing program at a particular school, this study is not designed to be generalized. Rather, the study is designed to be resonant: Its significance is not truly complete until is consumed by others who use their own subjectivity to make meaning from this study's findings.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study took place over a period of two months and included interviews with individual participants, two focus group sessions with all of the participants together, collage artwork created by the participants, and poetry generated from the interview transcripts.

Interviews and Participant Artwork

I met with each participant for interviews three times. To ensure my participant's comfort and candor, interviews were held outside of school hours, at a location away from the Las Colinas campus that afforded privacy and had been agreed upon by myself and each participant.

Each interview was framed with specific questions asked of all participants, and I followed up with additional questions to clarify answers that my participants gave. To prevent participant fatigue, I limited each interview session to an hour, although in four cases, my participants wished to converse longer. The combined total interview time for all four participants was 734 minutes.

First Interview. The first interview focused on each participant's personal and educational background, including what brought them into education. The first interviews were guided by the following interview questions:

1. Describe your early family life. What concepts of the world did you bring with you as you began your education?
2. Describe some educational experiences you had during your time as a K-12 student that you feel influence your current educational philosophy and pedagogical practices.

3. How do current educational policies and structures affect your day-to-day life as a teacher?

At the end of the first interview, participants were given art board, scissors, glue, crayons, and the prompt for their collage artwork: What gives you hope in education?

Participant artwork using the medium of collage. As part of the arts-based approach to data collection, I asked my participants to answer the question "What gives you hope in education?" using the visual art form of collage. I provided art board, scissors, glue, and crayons. The participants were responsible for finding the images to use on their respective art boards, and they could also include other forms of media, such as found objects, glitter, or text. The participants were given two weeks between the first and second interviews to complete their collages.

Second Interview. The participants shared their finished collages with me during the second interview session. During this time, the participants discussed the intent and meaning of their art works, the choices they made in their creative process, and answered questions I posed to clarify their meaning.

Third Interview. The third interview focused on member checking and clarification. During this interview, I shared preliminary findings with each participant, and each participant had the opportunity to clarify meaning and add to their story to give a more complete narrative.

Focus Groups. The purpose of the focus group sessions was for the participants to discuss their individual and shared experiences with the creative community collaboration, as well as to discuss themes that had emerged during our interviews.

The participants gathered together for two focus group sessions. The first took place at the midpoint of data collection, between the second and third interviews; the second took place at

the end, right before the teachers left for winter break. Like the individual participant interviews, the focus group sessions took place after school at an off-campus location that my participants and I agreed upon: A sushi restaurant. This unconventional venue was selected for several reasons: 1) The location was convenient for all of my participants, 2) my participants wanted a light meal after a day of teaching and were fond of sushi, 3) the restaurant was known to have very low business traffic in the afternoons, and 4) the restaurant's layout allowed us to have a dining area to ourselves so that our focus group sessions could be conducted in privacy. Each session lasted one hour.

First focus group. At the first focus group meeting, the following prompts and questions were posed to generate discussion:

1. Describe how the creative community came into being. What was the development process like?
2. How has your experience with the creative community compared to other collaborations or implementations that you have been involved with?
3. What do you get out of the creative community, both personally and professionally?
4. How do you think the creative community would be affected if it were institutionalized as part of the school's regular academic program or if it were graded?

Second focus group. At the second focus group meeting, I shared themes that had emerged in the data analysis of the first focus group and presented these themes for further discussion and clarification. These themes were:

1. Relationships, faculty dynamics, and trust,
    1a. Effects of national political climate and personal ideologies on the above
2. Educational structures, policies, school physical plant

3. Education culture (e.g. school, district, societal),
4. Issues of equality and access, and
5. What the creative community accomplishes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the arts-based methodologies of poetic and visual inquiry in a sequence designed to delve into the nuances that might otherwise be overlooked by standard qualitative methods (Doucet & Mathner, 2008; Gilligan, 2015; Bright, Kayes, Worrall, & McPherson, 2018).

What follows is a detailed explanation of my analysis process using the Listening Guide.

Poetic inquiry using Gilligan's Listening Guide. I used Gilligan's (2015) Listening Guide to generate found poetry from the interview recordings. I chose to use the Listening Guide, because it facilitates deep analysis of audio narrative and the unraveling of complexity (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015) analyzes narrative in four stages, with the narrative being replayed at each stage.

First listening. During the first listening, the researcher listens to identify the narrative's plot: What story or stories are being told? For this phase of the analysis, I listened to each interview and wrote down notes of what the participant had said, summarizing the c'nversations' evolution from topic to topic. Following the listening, I reviewed my notes to identify key plot points, generate a critical timeline for each participant, and identify emerging themes.

Below is a sample excerpt of the critical timeline generated during the first listening of Kris' first interview.

Table 2

Critical timeline generated during first listening of Kris, interview #1

Critical Incident	**Detail**
Early childhood	Grew up in Fullerton Youngest of four girls, 12-year age span
Family life	Very close extended family: Aunts, uncles, cousins were very present Kris was spoiled, tomboy, loved to help father in garage Always wanted a dog, got two different ones but father got rid of them. Kris got a dog when she grew up and got her own place, now has three.
Sports	Played sports in high school (tennis, swimming) Was a lifeguard
HS life	Very social, had established social circle Not very good at school, had fun, always joked around Didn't care about grades

	No academic memories, just remembers playing around. "I had the best time in German, I don't know if I passed." Always running, everywhere.
Childhood experiences	Active family lifestyle, was outside a lot Did not travel much but tagged along places with parents
Elementary school life DRESSES	Few memories of academics "It's all social." "I liked recess." Playing on monkey bars, fell off and then stopped Liked to read, ordered book club books from teacher at school (Snoopy) Got to deliver milk to classrooms at lunch, was a privilege Hated wearing dresses School dress code required dresses for girls Kris wore pants and got in trouble, principal called her mother.

	Happiest day of life -> not having to wear dresses anymore. Never wore another one.
Armenian identity	People would talk about their ancestry or ethnic backgrounds, would ask “What’s that?” when Kris said she was Armenian. “I don’t know how to like it, because I’m none of that.” Still bothers her. “We had a really strong culture growing up.” Family married Armenian, cooking. “I think as things go generation to generation, you sort of lose a little bit of that.” Bullied because of her difficult-to-say last name, not because of her ethnicity.
Teacher Mentor	PE teacher/tennis coach Kris didn’t make good first impression Played on tennis team, teacher recruited her for swim team even though she couldn’t swim (she learned) Wanted to be like her Kept Kris out of trouble

	Kris was her TA Made connection, advocated for Kris to go on school trip to DC Made Kris want to become teacher
Discouraged from becoming teacher	Kris went to guidance counselor about how to become a teacher, got blown off "I wouldn't do that, you're not gonna be able to get a job."

The plots generated during the first listenings form the structure of the individual narrative portraits of my participants, which are shared later in this chapter. The individual plotlines followed the respective participants' understanding of the course of their own life and how they perceived and reacted to events both within their own life and in the world as a whole.

Second listening. On the second listening, the researcher listens for the first person voice, recording each spoken "I" statement (subject and verb, with or without the object) in the order each one appears within the narrative. Each "I" statement becomes a line in a poem, with the researcher inserting a stanza break when the "I" shifts direction. The simplicity of the *I poem* format allows the researcher to identify how participants view and speak of themselves (Gilligan et al., 2015; Bright et al., 2018). This insight helps the researcher recognize nuances in the participants' spoken words, generating a deeper, more holistic analysis.

Below is an example of an "I Am" poem, which was generated during the second listening of Kris' first interview.

I worked at State University as a lab tech.

I did everything that wasn't a computer.

I set up labs,

I kept track of equipment,

I purged a lot of equipment,

I got to order a couple of four-wheel-drive vehicles,

I started training people.

I met a geochemistry professor, and

I really liked him.

I liked his style.

I told him I thought maybe I wanted to teach. When

I was done with all my classes but

I was still working on my thesis,

I went to work for him.

I had been developing training manuals,

I was running the little training classes for people.

I went over to State University's campus safety office where

I was the safety training officer.

I didn't get along very well in this office.

I was used to being in my own world.

I was not a hang-out-around-the-water-cooler kind of person, but they told me

I needed to spend more time around the water cooler.

I never made it past my first review.

I quit.

I remember looking at this guy and going "You've got to be kidding me."

I'm like

"I have work to do."

I was used to working like that

I'm like "You knew who you got."

I worked in a room all by myself,

I had my work done by 11 in the morning, and

I spent the rest of time working on my graduate work. Here,

I was starting to realize

I *needed* to be a teacher.

Third listening. The Listening Guide (2015) offers analytical and methodological flexibility to scholars in the third and fourth listenings (Gilligan, 2015; Bright, Kayes, Worrall, & McPherson, 2018). At this point, "the researcher's question becomings the rudder in steering the researcher toward the voices in the text that speak to his or her inquiry" *(Gilligan, 2015, p. 72).

The third listening focuses on social networks and relationships (Doucet & Mauther, 2008) as revealed through contrapuntal voices (Gilligan, 2015). "This is a reading that recognizes the narrated self-in-relation" (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 406). The poetry that emerged during this phase of my analysis revealed insights about my participants as individuals and how they viewed their relationships to one another, to their colleagues, to administrators, and to the teaching profession as a whole. Gilligan (2015) described this process as distinguishing "a

voice that speaks of the self as separate from a voice that speaks of the self as in relationship" (p. 72):

> Listening for contrapuntal voices thus picks up the tensions, the harmonies and dissonances between different voices, and underscores the musical aspect of listening where the goal is to listen for nuance, for modulation and silences (such as where "I" turns to "you" or drops out completely), to resist binary categories, and to hear complexity rather than flatten the data. (Gilligan, 2015, p. 72).

During the third listening, I noticed that all of my participants engaged in similar speech patterns which were characterized by shifts in perspective or reference as demonstrated through changes of first person, second person, first person plural, and third person pronouns. For example, a participant would begin a sentence in first person, speaking of himself or herself, and then change pronouns midsentence. Closer analysis of these patterns revealed that all of my participants used a similar pattern of pronoun usage as a way of distinguishing their point of view or of whom they were speaking, and with little variation, their pronouns shifted when referring to the same perspectives:

Table 3

Pronouns analysis in the third listenings

Pronoun	Point of View
I	Participant speaking as self
You	Participant speaking of teachers, in general
We	Participant speaking of teaching as a profession

They	Participants speaking of those with power over them (e.g. administrators, district personnel and curriculum specialists, policy makers)

To probe these perspectives for additional insight or themes, I created an "I-You-They-We" poem for each interview. Written in columns, these poems allowed me to apply multiple analyses to the same poem: I could analyze one perspective at a time, I could analyze multiple perspectives against one another, and I could analyze the context in which statements were made in various perspectives and regarding specific relationships.

The following is a breakdown of an I-You-They-We poem generated during the second listening of Kris' third interview:

Table 4

I-You-They-We poem, Kris interview #3

I	You	They	We
I don't know why. Maybe I know why. I think maybe I know why. I think there's been a lot of pressure put on people to be at some standard.		It seems like people are really afraid to let people know what they're doing	If we don't feel like we're at that standard, that asking for help or collaborating might seem more like a

I totally see collaboration as a strength. I think, "Why am I here? I shouldn't be here with these people."	But if you feel like you're not coming into a collaboration at the same level... where you walk into a group and you're like, But you forge ahead and you do what you want to, but	if somebody really feels that way and	weakness than a strength. We've all been there,

		they're forced in that collaborative setting, then	
I don't think	you're gonna get much out of 'em.		
It has to really be a trust thing For me			
			we pick and choose the teachers that
mine included.			are gonna come and work with us. There are no egos,

The following poem is the same poem, generated from Kris' third interview, but this time, it is written out in poem form without the structure and, perhaps, the disruption of the columns and their structuring lines. Written this way, the poem has a more sprawling appearance, but the narrative is preserved in a format that better represents the natural flow of the participant's speech:

It seems like

people are really afraid

to let people know what

they're doing.

I don't know why.

Maybe I know why.

I think *maybe* I know why:

there's been a lot of pressure put on people to be at some standard.

If we don't feel like

we're at that standard,

asking for help or

collaborating

might seem more like a weakness

than a strength.

I totally see collaboration as a strength.

But if you feel like

you're not coming into a collaboration at the same level...

We've all been there,

I think,

where you walk into a group and you're like,

"Why am I here?

I shouldn't be here with these people."

You forge ahead and

you do what

you want to,

but

if somebody really feels that way and

they're forced in that collaborative setting, then

I don't think you're gonna get much out of 'em.

It has to really be a trust thing.

we pick and choose the teachers

that are gonna come and work with us.

There are no egos,

mine included.

The data analyzed and generated during the third listening informed further analysis, performed through visual inquiry, and facilitated discussion during the second focus group session.

Fourth listening. The fourth listening focuses on sociopolitical narratives and power structures that provide context and a frame for my participants' stories (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Gilligan, 2015; Bright, Kayes, Worrall, & McPherson, 2018). The sociopolitical narratives in each participant's story connected "micro-narratives and macro-level structures and processes" (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 406) – contemporary political and social tones, in the case of this study – with the faculty culture at Las Colinas Junior High School.

The identified power structures included district and site leadership, academic departments, and personal relationships and alliances among faculty members. The fourth listening also revealed contention among faculty members which was based on personal ideologies and conflicting philosophies on what should be taught in schools and how. This data facilitated discussion during the second focus group session.

Visual inquiry

I used visual inquiry in two distinct ways for this study: Data collection and data analysis. In each role, the visual inquiry took a different form and was used in a unique way.

Collage. I used participant-generated collage as a data collection tool. My participants created collages, which functioned as springboards for discussion in the second interviews. The data generated from the collages was analyzed using the listening guard as part of the interview analyses, as each participant explained his or her art work and the choices made during the creative process.

Painting. I used the visual art medium of painting to explore and analyze ideas generated during participant interviews and the focus groups. The flexible and adaptive nature of acrylic and mixed-media painting enabled me to explore themes that had emerged during the interviews and focus groups, as well as examine relationships between themes.

Because painting can be ephemeral – a canvas can look drastically different at the end of an analysis session than it did at the beginning – I documented my process by photographing each art work at points that I felt were significant in the painting's evolution. These photos were taken on my smartphone for the sake of convenience and for the ease of saving the process photos on an encrypted password-protected server. Final photos of the paintings were taken with a full-frame digital single lens reflex camera, which allowed for precision, a high level of resolution and clarity, and color fidelity, all of which were necessary to express the detail and message of the paintings in printed reproduction.

To provide examples of how data was analyzed and generated by painting, I present below the process for one of the art works created as part of data analysis.

Spatial analysis through a painted sociogram. Physical space emerged as a theme during my interviews with participants. The participants' accounts of collaborations with which they had been involved, raised the question of whether physical space and proximity might influence collaboration and interaction for other teachers at the school. I wanted to explore physical aspects of the school campus and the teachers' relationships within, a task that required a physical form of analysis that would include multiple dimensions at once. The ability to create multiple layers and express diverse aspects simultaneously made painting a particularly well-suited medium for this type of analysis, so I set to work.

Beginning the analysis process. I began my analysis by painting an abstract map of the school. To maintain confidentiality while also maintaining accurate proximity and space, I rearranged the campus layout on my canvas somewhat by moving buildings' placements, combining some buildings, and removing non-classroom buildings. I wanted the relationships and the various levels of their significance to stand out on the canvas, so I spread several layers of dark wash over the painted campus map to mute the colors of the buildings and deemphasize them while keeping them visible.

Next, I used an off-white oil pastel to draw very light lines between the classrooms of teachers who were mentioned in the interview and focus group sessions or personally observed on campus as having a connection. These connections fell into the following categories:

1. Collegial relationships in which teachers spent time together socially at school but not outside of school;
2. Personal friendships in which teachers interact socially outside of school, even if they do not interact socially at school;
3. Collaborative relationships in which groups teachers have worked together on large-scale projects at school (e.g. the school's Latin American culture festival, the school's civic engagement fair); and
4. Collaborative relationships in which individual teachers have worked together on small-scale projects at school (e.g. two classes collaborating to make 'zines).

Once I had applied these connections to the canvas, I examined the painting to look for patterns. In doing so, I noticed two patterns that required an adjustment to my methodology. First, several teachers were connected multiple times and through multiple types of relationship, so I would need to use multiple colors in the connecting lines to distinguish one relationship

from another. Second, a fifth category, not previously traced, had become evident: Personal alliances. This new category represented faculty relationships in which the teachers shared a perspective or a goal, provided morale support to one another, supported one another's perspectives and goals when facing opposition from administration or other faculty members, and promoted one another personally and professional. These personal alliances functioned in a similar way as do the cliques that existed among some of the students at Las Colinas Junior High School.

Analysis-informed revision. The new categories of relationship required that I revise my canvas accordingly. I painted over the previous image with a diluted wash so that the off-white lines could be drawn over but the main image depicting the school campus was still discernable.

Next, I assigned oil pastel colors to each of the categories I had previously identified. I also added a category for *personal alliances,* and I added another category to denote teachers who are involved with the creative community; I assigned colors to each of these new categories as well.

Using these different colored oil pastels, I colored over the old off-white lines to connect the classrooms of teachers who shared a relationship. The following is a key to the painting's color coding:

Table 5

Color key, sociogram painting

Color	Relationship
Blue	collegial relationships among teachers; these may remain within a department or be interdepartmental
Pink	personal friendships in which the teachers interact socially outside of school
Orange	teachers who have collaborated on the school's Latin American culture festival
Yellow	teachers who have collaborated on the school's civic engagement fair
Green	teachers who have collaborated on small-scale projects, either within their department or on a cross-curricular scale
Red	Personal alliances in which the colleagues support and promote the work of one another
Purple	Creative Community participants

A theme that emerged during the second focus group was low faculty morale; my participants indicated that low morale had cast a pall over the Las Colinas faculty and had the dual effect of isolating teachers and perpetuating isolation. The sociogram painting needed to

represent this pall and general faculty mood. With all of the colors in place, the canvas was too bright.

To cast a pall over the canvas and represent the low morale of the faculty, I mixed a wash using Black 2.0, a highly pigmented matte acrylic developed by British artist Stuart Semple (Munzenrieder, 2017) and billed as "the most pigmented, flattest, mattest, black acrylic paint in the world" (Semple, 2016). The light-absorbent properties of this particular paint were perfect for creating the oppressive, almost dirty effect I wanted to achieve on canvas; the wash flattened the images on the canvas, deemphasized the building representations by giving them a ghostly appearance, and gave the entire canvas a grimy feel.

Now, with a canvas that represented the pall of low faculty morale, I needed to represent my participants' feelings that collaborations with colleagues and, for two in particular, the creative community were a saving grace, giving the teachers a place where they felt they had agency, voice, and an ability to connect organically with colleagues and students. To accomplish this, I needed to reapply the lines that represented the various relationships among teachers at Las Colinas. This time, however, I wanted to characterize the nature of the relationships, as the data indicated that some relationships were more consistent whilst others could be ephemeral, depending on the length of a collaboration, staffing and the master schedule, and the general shifts that can occur within personal relationships. Here, medium helped convey the qualities of the relationships: While I again used pastels to represent connections among teachers, I selected specific types of pastels for how they adhere to surfaces and how the resulting appearances suggest the nature of the relationships. For consistent relationships, I used oil pastels, which are held together with gum binder and are thus very stable in their adherence to canvas. For more ephemeral relationships, I used soft pastels, which do not contain much binder and, therefore, are

more fragile; they tend to crumble and turn into powder when applied to a surface, and this soft effect suggested relationships that could disintegrate easily.

At this point, I identified one additional category of relationship: Former master teacher/student teacher pairings, in which a student teacher was hired full-time at the school and now worked alongside his or her former master teachers. There were six of these pairings at Las Colinas, representing three student teachers and four master teachers. I represented this type of relationship with teal oil pastel.

Table 6

Addendum to sociogram painting color key

Color	Relationship
Teal	former master teacher/student teacher pairings

Analyzing the connections. At this point, the lines on the canvas plainly showed multiple points of confluence, in which a teacher was involved in multiple relationships and, perhaps, multiple types of relationships. Each point represented a teacher, and each line emanating from a point represented a relationship between that teacher and a colleague; hence, the more lines that converged at a teacher's point indicated the quantity of that teacher's relationships.

The sociogram painting also indicated the diversity of teachers' relationships. Some teachers had many lines to represent many connections with colleagues on campus, yet their connections represented a limited number of collaborations. For example, one teacher had six lines emanating from her point, but those connections only represented two types of

relationships: Four connections within a collaboration and two connections which were personal relationships. Likewise, several teachers had many connections with colleagues, but all of these connections were collegial relationships within their department, and none of these teachers had connections of any type outside of the department.

To explore these points of confluence and the diversity of relationships represented in the sociogram painting, I analyzed the canvas for the following: 1) Which teachers had multiple relationships, 2) what types of relationships these teachers had, and 3) how many of these relationships overlapped among the same teachers. To focus my analysis, I limited my analysis to teachers who had four or more connections of three or more relationship types painted on the sociogram. Teachers who were part of the creative community were included no matter how many relationship types were represented in their connections. I did not chart collegial relationships, since the collaborative relationships I was charting presumed the existence of such a relationship. I also did not chart previous student teacher-master teacher pairings, since these were so few in number.

In the first analysis, I counted the total number of connections and charted whether or not the teacher was part of Las Colinas' creative community.

Table 7

Sociogram connections by teacher

Teacher	Total connections	Creative Community participant
Linnea	25	Yes
Liz	23	Yes
Bryan	12	Yes
Nicola	12	No
Randy	12	Yes
Mona	11	Yes
Xiomara	11	No
Wade	8	Yes
Jacinta	7	No
Kris	6	Yes

In the next analysis, I eliminated connections related to the creative community to examine the teachers' relationships outside of the community's activities. I also did not chart participation in the civic engagement fair, which was a departmental collaboration in which all English teachers participated. I counted and charted these connections in Table 8.

Table 8

Sociogram connections by type

Teacher	Connections	Personal friendships	Latin American culture festival	Small-scale projects	Personal alliances	Creative Community participant
Liz	17	4	4	4	2	Yes
Linnea	14	3	4	1	2	Yes
Jacinta	7	3	4			No
Randy	7	1	4	2	1	Yes
Nicola	6	4		2		No
Xiomara	4	3		2		No
Mona	3	1		1		Yes
Wade	3	1		1	1	Yes
Bryan	1			1		Yes
Kris	1	1				Yes

Findings

The following four chapters present the findings from my interviews and focus group sessions with my participants. These findings are represented in a combination of narrative prose, poetry, and image, which begin as individual stories and weave into one shared story as the teachers evolve from their respective upbringings to their at-once collective and personal experiences as teachers at Las Colinas Junior High School and mentors within the Las Colinas creative community.

This section is structured into the following parts: 1) An introductory section that includes participant introductions and origin stories of the participants' respective childhoods and paths to becoming teachers; 2) a sociogram painting that depicts connections, relationships, and influence among teachers at Las Colinas Junior High School; 3) an examination of organizational culture at Las Colinas as revealed through accounts of the participants' individual and collective experiences as teachers at the school; and 4) a collective account of the participants' experiences as mentors within the creative community.

The findings are presented in a combination of narrative prose, painting, and found poetry. The chosen medium for a given chapter or section was selected for its ability to preserve or represent my participants' voices and experiences effectively and with the most fidelity to their intention. Because of this important consideration, the narrative in this section will alternate between prose and poetry.

Chapter 4: The Teachers

My four participants were all teachers at Las Colinas Junior High School and mentors within the creative community. This section presents an individual introduction to each participant.

Randy

Randy Johnson is a 61 year-old teacher who has been teaching for 25 years. During his first year of teaching, he served as a long-term substitute teacher for a high school drama teacher who was on maternity leave. When she returned to work the following year, Randy was able to secure a position at teaching history at Las Colinas Junior High School. After two years of teaching history, he took over the drama program at Las Colinas from a teacher who had had a successful program but was tired of criticism from administration and colleagues. Randy has been teaching drama ever since. At the time of this study, he is the only junior high teacher in the Arroyo Seco Unified School District who has a full six-course load of theatre classes.

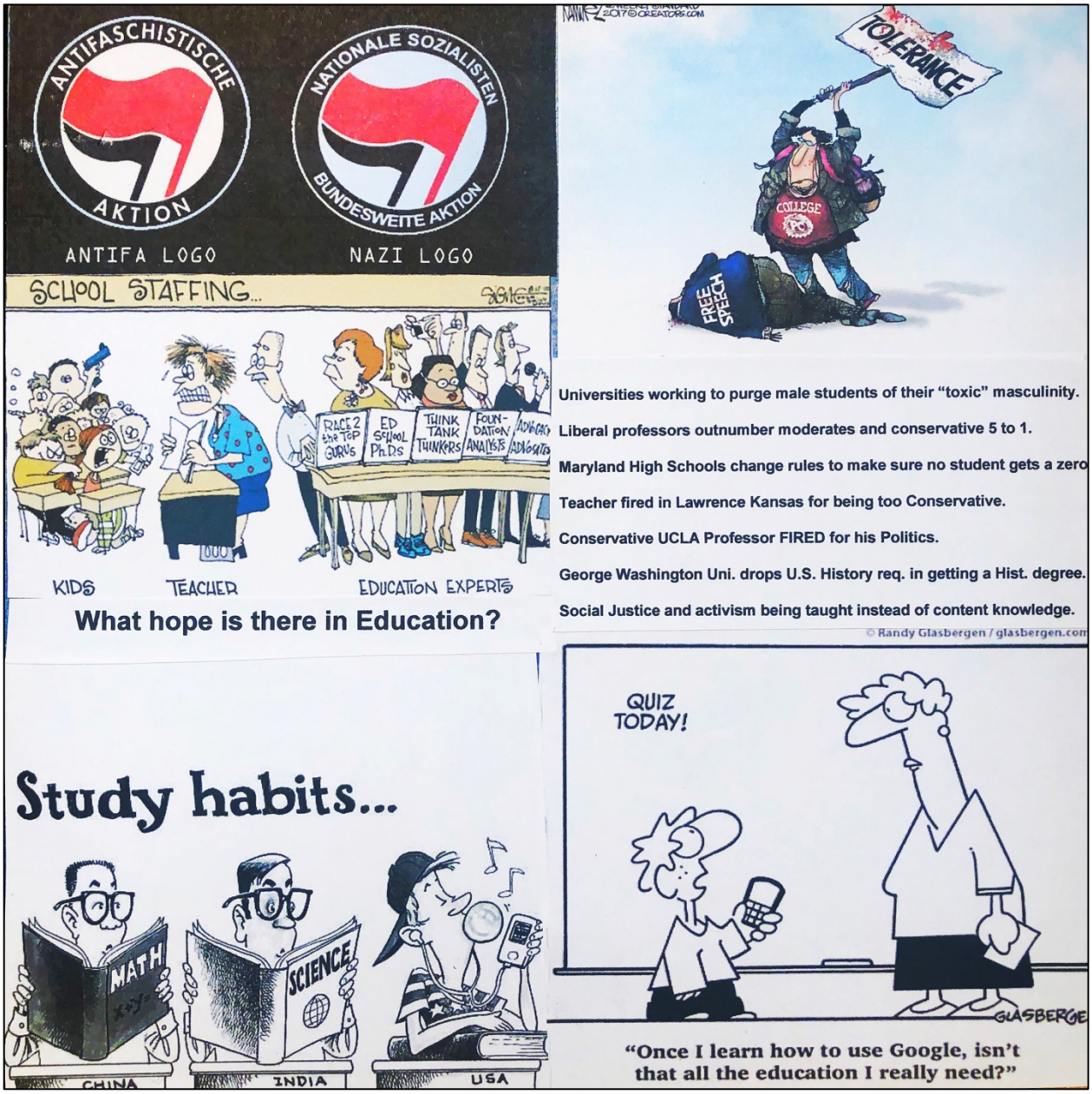
Among the Las Colinas faculty, Randy is known for being a Christian and for his conservatism. He describes himself as a "libertarian, Republican conservative with a religious background." Randy is open about his convictions – he wears a cross lapel pin every day – but he does not discuss his beliefs and views with his colleagues unless he is drawn into a conversation by someone else. He is happy to engage in discussions of social and political issues, as well as social and professional interactions, with colleagues who have other views as long as the discussion remains respectful.

"What's wrong with disagreeing?" he asked. "I'm never going to change your mind on some of your subjects, and you're never gonna change my mind. We know that. Now that we know that, where can we work together?"

Randy is one of the founders of the creative community. He has been consistently involved with the community's development, and he has served as a mentor for all but one year of the community's existence. On the year during which he did not serve as a mentor, Randy still participated in the creative community by supporting other teachers as they mentored their students and by taking an active role in the organization and execution of the reflective interview day.

Figure 1

Randy's collage



Linnea

Linnea Cosentino is a 39 year-old teacher who has spent all fifteen years of her teaching career at Las Colinas Junior High School. She teaches dance, a program which she developed from the ground up 10 years ago, and English.

In addition to her teaching duties and being a mentor teacher in the creative community, Linnea often leads professional development for teachers across the Arroyo Seco Unified School District at the request of district curriculum specialists. Linnea also works with a nearby university on curriculum implementation studies, as well as development and implementation of professional development for teachers. Because of her relationship with this university, she is often requested as a master teacher for preservice teachers in the university's credential program.

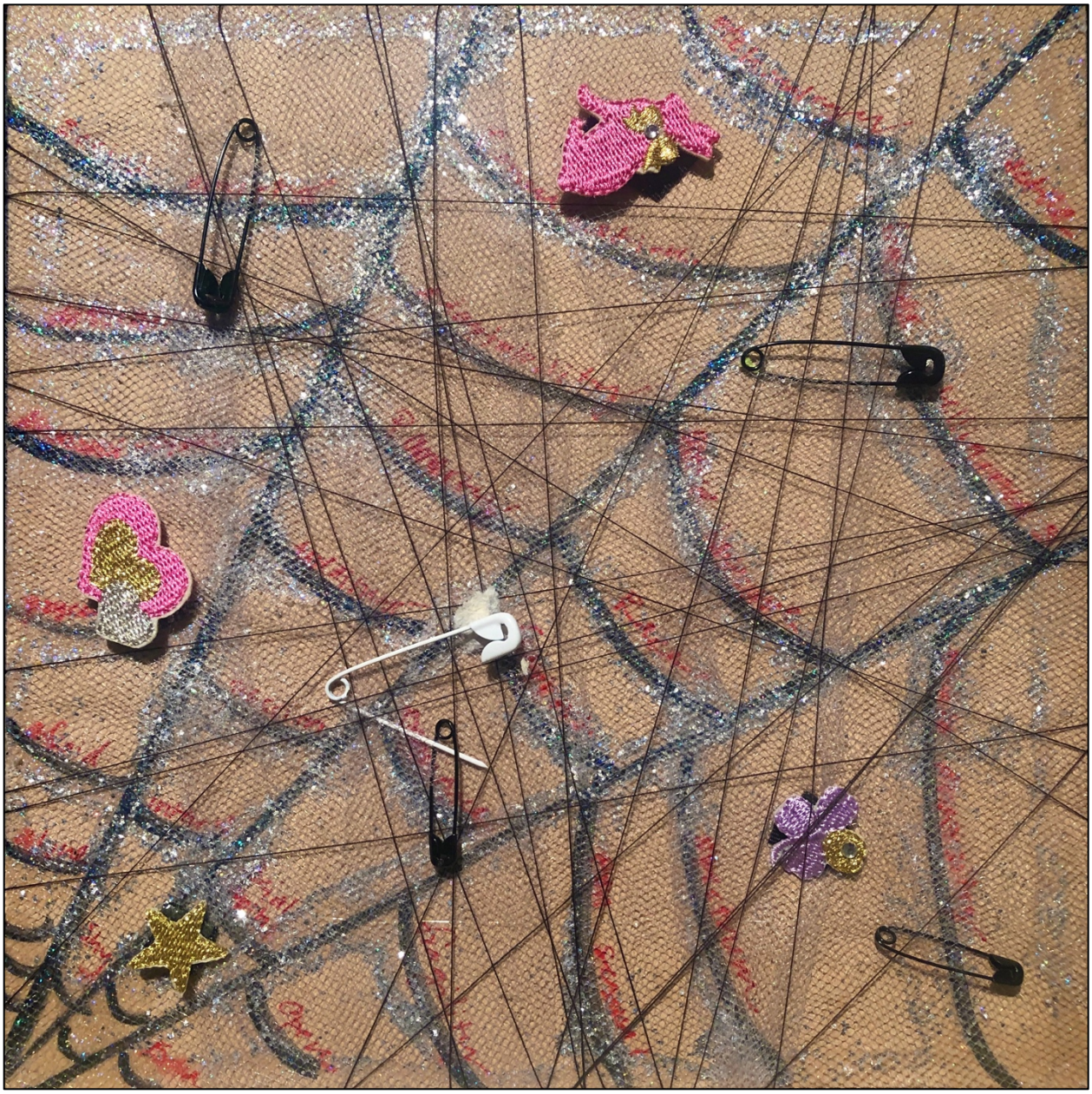
Linnea's life outside of school is as busy as her life at work. She is an active poet whose work has been published in several zines and poetry journals, and she is a frequent fixture at poetry readings and festivals in the area. Linnea is also a musician; she has been a singer in several bands, with genres ranging from folk-rock to punk, and is currently in two, one of which has toured extensively throughout the United States and Europe.

Linnea is one of the founding teachers of the creative community. She was very active in the development of the program, and she has mentored students in each year of the community's existence. Several of the students she mentored received high honors for the exceptionality of their creative projects.

Linnea has a saying, "Do rad things." This phrase is apt, considering that she is involved with so many collaborations and activities on campus, and the school's administration calls on her frequently to help promote district and school site initiatives.

Figure 2

Linnea's collage



Wade

Wade Gallagher is a 57 year-old teacher at Las Colinas. Like Linnea, Wade has taught at Las Colinas for the entirety of his 22-year teaching career. While his current teaching assignment is computer programming and film-making, he has also taught math, computer animation, and business.

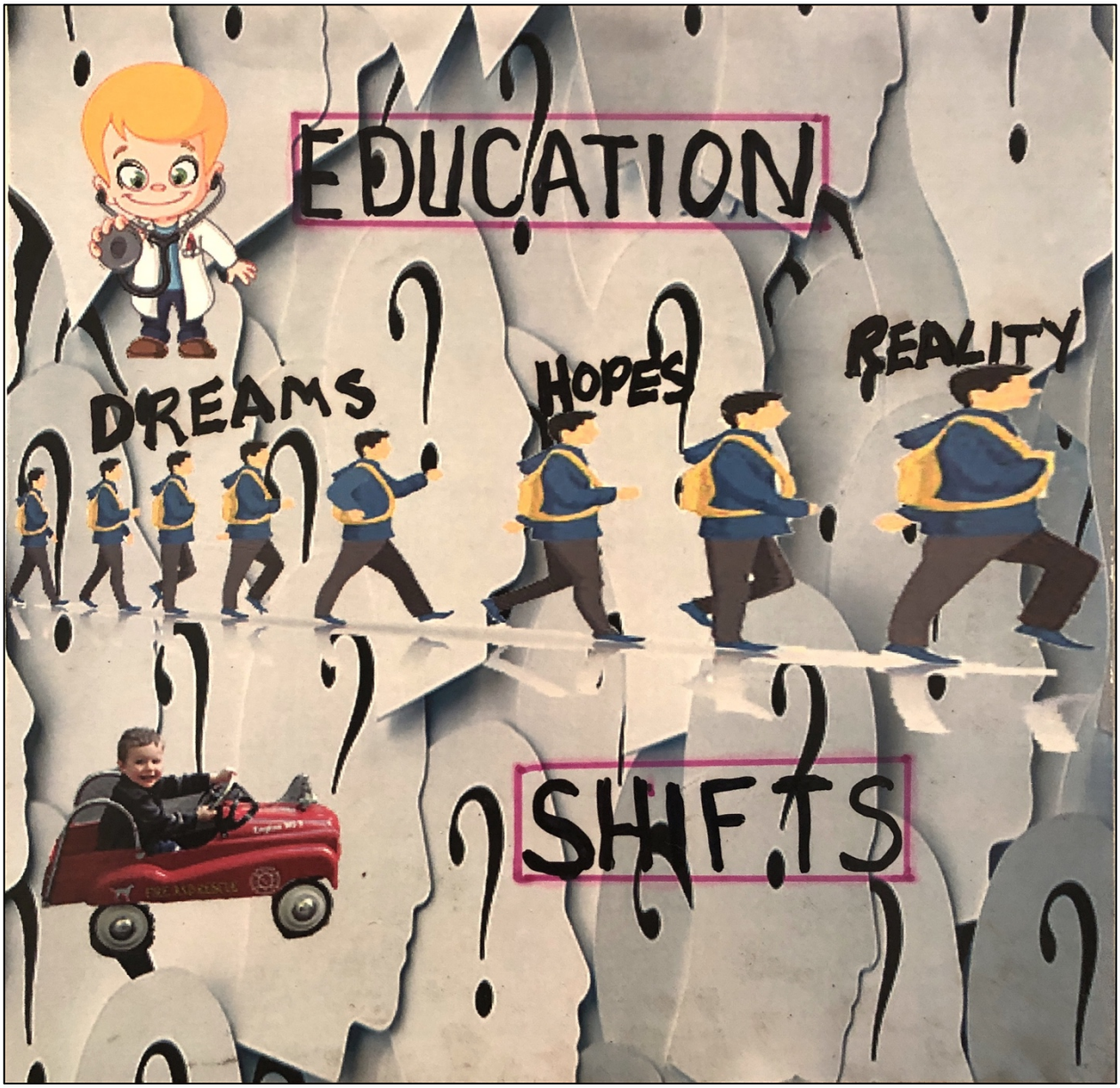
Because Wade was the only computer programming and film-making teacher at Las Colinas, his opportunities for collaboration have been limited. His first experience in cross-curricular collaboration was a film project that his film class did with my English class a few years ago; initially, he did this collaboration, because his participation was requisite for a sizable technology grant that we had written and received. Wade enjoyed the collaboration so much that we repeated the collaboration for two more years until my teaching assignment changed.

Wade also participated in a collaboration with a special education teacher and a local university to offer an after-school STEM class. This program's existence was contingent on grant funding, and when the grant ended two years later, so did the STEM class.

Like Randy and Linnea, Wade has been involved with the creative community since its inception and was part of the team that developed the community's vision and organizational structure. Even if he did not have a student to mentor in a given year, Wade was still an active participant in the creative community during each year of implementation.

Figure 3

Wade's collage



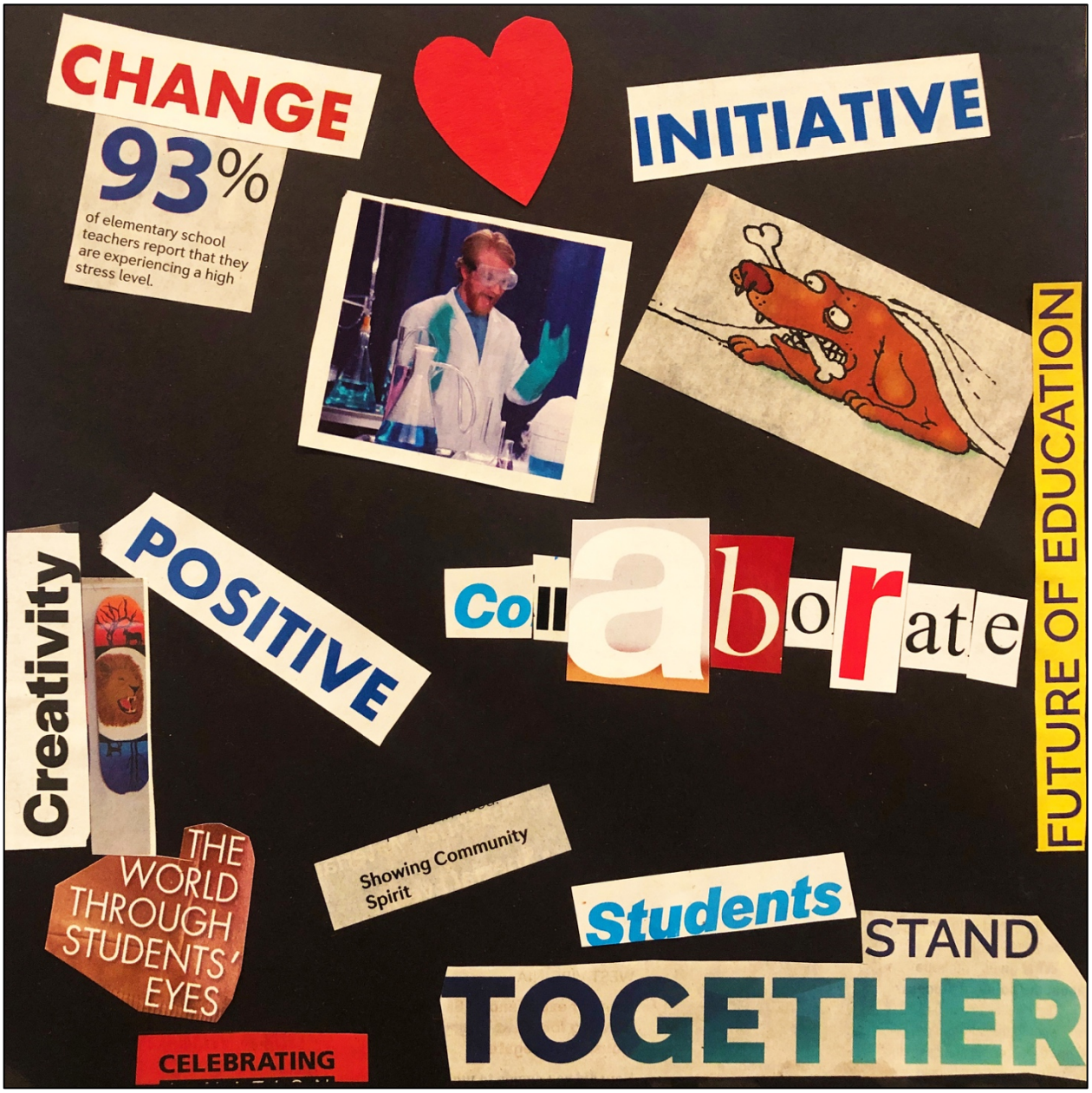
Kris

Kris Kayekjian is a 58 year-old teacher at Las Colinas Junior High School. A United States Air Force veteran, she is in her ninth year of teaching and her second at the junior high school level. Previously, she taught high school earth science until she was moved to Las Colinas because of credential compliance imposed by the Next Generation Science Standards. In addition to teaching at Las Colinas, Kris teaches science and education classes at several community colleges in the area, she is a lead teacher for the school district's summer Gear Up program, and she teaches in a summer bridge program at a nearby university.

Of the four participants, Kris had the least amount of time being involved with the creative community – this was her first year – although she had been part of collaborations at her old school and at the district level. Kris was attracted to the creative community because she saw it as an opportunity to connect with students and colleagues.

Figure 4

Kris' collage



Origin Stories

Randy

"I was born in Wichita, Kansas. Right in the middle of the Bible Belt," Randy began. "My dad was an engineer, but back then, engineering was not a highly regarded profession, so he wasn't paid that well. He and I went out hunting to put meat on the table."

Randy credited his Kansas background and family life as key in his development into what he termed "a rugged individualist."

You got a day's pay for a day's work
You didn't work?
    You didn't get paid.
If you had a problem,
    you solved it.
If you needed help,
    you asked for it.
You went to family, extended family, to church.
You never
    went to a charity or
    asked the government for help.
If you couldn't do it,
    you did without.
You were taught to be dependent on yourself,
    solve your problems.

Take care of yourself.

Those that are in your care, you

take care of them.

Rugged individualism means

You get it done.

When the rubber meets the road,

It's you.

Rugged means I can do it.

If I succeed, I go,

"I did that."

Not boastful,

not looking for sympathy.

Just getting it done

to where

you can sit down at the end of the day and say,

"I did a good job today.

I feel good."

Despite his father's engineering job, agriculture and farming was woven into Randy's everyday life. His school in Kansas was housed in a single large building, and the playground backed up to a cattle ranch. "We were always going over and tipping cows," Randy chuckled.

Randy remembers his Kansas schooling as being extremely regimented and orderly. "Everybody was in single file lines, always. We went in single file lines to lunch, to the library, to the classroom, to the bus. *Everything* was single file lines."

When Randy was 12, his father secured a job in aerospace, and the family moved to southern California. Randy described the experience moving from agrarian Kansas to suburban Orange County as a culture shock.

"Nobody could understand me, because I talked with an accent," he said. "The school was a free-for-all. Kids talked back to teachers. Our classes were held in 15-minute modules, and I could make my own schedule. I wasn't told which period I had to take which class – you could pick and choose your own day. To me, it was quite strange. I was just going, 'You're trusting a high schooler to pick their schedule? Like really? Seriously?'"

The move to California put stress on Randy's family. Randy's mother left, his older brother and sister moved out, and his father became emotionally and physically absent from his son. Randy was 15 years old and on his own. He got a job as a lifeguard and began supporting himself financially.

Just over a year later, Randy's life changed drastically.

"My dad found a new woman," Randy said. One day when Randy came home from school, he learned that she had moved in. "She said to me, 'What the hell are you doing here?' And I came back with, 'Who the hell do you think you are?' And next thing I knew, I was out on the street."

Randy was 17 when his father kicked him out of the house. With the money he had saved from his lifeguard job, he was able to rent an apartment near his high school.

"I rented an apartment and threw a big, huge party," Randy said. At this party, he met his future wife, Pam. She was two years behind him at school and had heard some things about him that were not true, but they got to talking at the party, sorted out fact from rumor, and started dating. They have now been married for 42 years, have two daughters, and three grandchildren.

On one of their first dates, Randy and Pam went to see their high school's play, *Barefoot in the Park.* Randy thought that the male lead was terrible and told Pam so. He didn't know that the high school's drama teacher was right behind them and had heard every word of his critique.

"'You think you can do better, huh?'" Randy recalled him saying. "It was put up or shut up. I went, 'I'll show this guy that I can do this.' And, the next day, I was in his class. That set my life on a completely different course."

Randy took theatre classes and worked on productions, but he never was cast for a role onstage. "Because of my big mouth, they never let me on the stage in front of production. I was always doing everything else but. I asked the drama teacher why, and he just said, 'Has your opinion of theatre changed?' I said, 'Yes, sir.' And he said, 'Sorry. You're in 12th grade now, but no, you're not going on stage. That's just the way it is."

Randy continued working tech for his high school productions. In college, he acted in some plays, but he was not able to be as active in theatre as he would have liked. "I was working during the day and going to school at night, because I was on my own and had to make a living."

Randy's relationship with Pam was also getting serious. They knew they wanted to get married and were talking seriously about their future. "Pam asked me, 'What are you gonna do for a job?' I said, 'Acting.' She got *that look.* So I declared myself a history major and planned to become a history teacher. Life got in the way, though. After college, Pam and I got married, and I got a job doing facilities engineering, which didn't require a full engineering degree and

used the least amount of math. Acting became secondary, something I did on the side just for myself."

Randy worked as a facilities engineer in the aerospace industry, and before long, he was asked to become a trainer.

"Out of all the engineers in the facilities department, you're the only one that doesn't have a portfolio of complaints," Randy recalled his boss telling him. "Yours is a portfolio of 'Like to work with him. Does a great job. Knows what he's doing.'"

Randy became a trainer. He worked in this capacity until his job was replaced with technology – first by a laser disc and then by a computer. Randy was then transferred to a managerial position, but he found the position to be personally challenging – his superiors were confrontational and the workers were noncommittal – so he began thinking of what other jobs he might be able to do. He remembered his college dream of being a history teacher and enrolled in a year-long teaching credential program at a nearby university. To support Pam and his two daughters in the meantime, Randy worked as an independent contractor and house painter.

History and English teaching credential in hand, Randy was offered a position teaching history at Las Colinas Junior High School in 1996.

Fortuitous Happenstance. The drama teacher at Las Colinas was frustrated. She was tired of hearing people complain about her theatre program. She had said for months that she was going to walk away from the program: If people didn't like it, they could take it up themselves and run the drama program the way they thought it should be run. No one took her talk seriously until the morning she announced at a faculty meeting that she was stepping away from the program and transferring to another school, where she would teach a full load of English.

That afternoon, the teachers' lunchroom was abuzz with discussion about what might happen to the school's drama program. The principal was unlikely to hire a new drama teacher from outside, because the program was only two periods: Drama I and Drama II. Teachers with English credentials were able to teach the class, but the English teachers were adamant that they did not want to teach drama. Would the program die?

Randy, in his second year as a history teacher at Las Colinas, was passing through the main office after school when the principal called him into his office.

"You taught drama at the high school," the principal began.

"I was a long-term sub there while Carol Hawkins was on maternity leave," Randy said.

"And I hear that you've been in commercials."

Randy nodded. "A few. I was in a Coke commercial and…"

"And someone said you were in some movies?"

"Mostly as a background actor, but I have my SAG card, and I've been featured with a few lines here and there. It's just something I do for some extra money in the summer."

"And you've been in some plays?"

Randy paused. "Summer community theatre a few years back. *Twelve Angry Men* and a swing for *Paint Your Wagon.*" He wondered if this was going where he thought it might be going.

The principal nodded and leaned back. He paused for a moment, tapping his fingers together under his chin.

"How'd you like to take over the drama program here?"

Randy felt his heart leap in his chest. "Whoa!" He thought for a moment. He had never taught an acting class, had only been a drama student and a working actor. Yet here was an

opportunity to spend every day in a theatre environment, to spend every day doing something he loved.

"Could I grow the program?" Randy asked the principal. "It's two periods now, but we could do so much more and really put Las Colinas on the map if the program were bigger. I have some ideas…"

At the end of the impromptu meeting, Randy was the new drama teacher, the number of drama sections being offered had risen from two to four with the promise of a full six-course offering the following year, and the principal was completely on board with the things that Randy wanted to do with the program, including the addition of a stagecraft class.

Randy's experience as a working actor and stage tech shaped his approach to teaching middle school drama. "I had a passion. Now I had to teach others that you can do everything you want to. Acting didn't have to be the end all to be all, but it could be an outlet, and it could be fun."

Randy also felt that having to make his own way at an early age helped him get through his first years of being a drama teacher. "There's been situations where most people, I think, probably would have given up, but I just get back up and say, 'Okay, I gotta take a break. Let me figure this out.' I've always had that creative bit when I step back and figure out how to get around something or through it, over it, or under it. I did that with teaching school. Have fun, hit the wall, figure out how to go around it."

Randy lamented the current state of arts in the Arroyo Seco district. He felt that arts in general – and performing arts in particular – had been marginalized by a district administration that placed greater value, and therefore curricular priority, on STEM classes and electives. He

said that this lack of recognition and support represents the greatest challenge he faces in his work.

"People don't understand my passion or how I will do whatever it takes to get what I want done for my class. People don't understand that anymore. My current site administration supports me, and the teachers at Las Colinas support me, but beyond that, there's no support anywhere. It's very limited."

Randy explained that this lack of respect and support does not extend to all of the arts electives. He posited that the band and choir programs get more recognition and accommodation with course requests and venue scheduling.

"Visual art, dance, and drama – even though we are part of the visual and performing arts department, we never get what band and choir do. When I come on strong like the band leaders do, I'm looked at as being a pain in the butt. Why is it they can and I can't? The administrators want to say that they support the arts, but they don't, and part of the problem is that they don't understand – and they don't want to understand – what it takes. They think it's like the Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney movies where they go, 'Let's put on a show!' And they were looking at a barn that could be pushed over with a finger, when on the very next day, it's a Broadway theater. It just *happens* in those movies, and that's what these people think theatre is: That it just *happens*. No! That's three months of prep work, people!"

Performance time and venue access were also sore points, according to Randy. The school administration questioned why the drama classes needed two weeks of time blocked off in the multipurpose room for rehearsals and performances each semester when the band and choir only needed one evening per semester for their winter and spring concerts.

"They don't understand it," Randy said. "I'm a different animal."

Linnea

"I grew up in such a really sweet, suburban family life." Linnea said. "Seriously, I grew up in the ultimate suburban experience."

This ultimate suburban experience involved a tight-knit family of four – mother, father, brother Ethan, Linnea – and a two-story Spanish-style tract home built in the late 1960s that had a large backyard with a pool. The neighborhood was filled with young families whose children were Linnea's classmates at school, plus a few empty nesters who had been original owners when the tract was built. It was a safe place. The neighbors knew one another and kept an eye on the kids who played in the streets in the afternoons after school and all day in the summer.

Linnea's family was active and encouraged creativity in one another. "My parents always loved art and loved music – my mom played the accordion – and loved doing stuff. We weren't a sit around and watch TV family. We were, like, a go-on-a-hike family or make something kind of family."

Creativity was encouraged. "Ethan's one of those mastermind people who could play an instrument or be like, 'I'm gonna write a book,' and then he did. He'd be like, 'I'm gonna take apart the computer and put it back together again.' The time he did that, my mom was like, 'You better put that back together before dad gets home and finds out!'

"Me? I always went to dance class, so that was always a thing, but I was also the one who had to work harder to do things."

Looking back at her childhood, Linnea mused that life was perhaps not as halcyon as it appeared. "I think my parents were trying to steer the ship," she said. "I grew up in such a really sweet, suburban family life. But then I always have to reflect on the fact that that was hard won

by my parents. They were trying to hold it together. I didn't find out till I was an adult that our lives were more chaotic than I knew."

She didn't know it then, but Linnea and her brother were actually in the eye of a familial hurricane.

"When I was a kid, my parents did a very good job of being like, 'Oh, there's the four of us, and we're very family and we do this and that.' But then as an adult, I know, 'Oh, and we also have some super chaotic extended family members that we're hiding away from!'"

Linnea's parents shielded their children from the extended family tumult. Linnea explained that everyone on her grandmother's side of the family had gone to prison for laundering money, possibly for the Mafia, but her grandmother had managed to avoid legal calamity, because she had married a non-Italian and had an Anglo surname. Linnea's parents also kept a chronically depressed uncle away from their children – he ultimately committed suicide.

"There was a lot of chaotic stuff that my parents held their arms up strong to keep out of our familial family fortress, almost, like they were battle. And when you realize that as an adult, you're like, 'Dang, that was gnarly.'"

The Cosentino family had a comfortable economic situation, so her mother was able to stay home with her children when they were young. However, when Linnea entered elementary school, her mother to university to pursue a Bachelor's degree and teaching credential. This began a difficult time for Linnea. The concessions that family members had to make to accommodate the mother's college schedule were hard on her.

“I remember it was a big fight,” she said. “Now I had to go to friends' houses after school and do homework there. It was really weird to be in someone else's house, in someone else's space.”

Linnea’s attitude toward school was affected.

“I liked school until I was in second grade,” Linnea said. “I liked kindergarten, and I liked first grade, but in second grade, I figured out that I could make my lactose intolerant self sick at lunch by drinking milk, and then I could go home early. I’d go to the nurse and beg her, ‘Call my grandma.’ And when my grandma wouldn’t pick me up anymore, I’d say, ‘Call the neighbor!’

“Second grade was just different. It might have been the teacher. It might have been that I was really bad at spelling. I just didn’t wanna do it anymore.”

A present from her uncle gave Linnea a creative outlet.

“For my birthday, my uncle gave me a book, and it was blank. All the pages were blank. And he was like, ‘Just see what happens. Just see what you put in this book.’ He was into drafting and drawing, so I'm sure he was expecting something more like that, but I just ended up writing poems and, actually, songs too. My brother played piano, and so I would plunk out little songs. I still have them.”

“That was the first time I wrote anything myself,” Linnea said. “If nobody says, ‘You can write something,’ you don't know you can. You just listen to it, or you just like it, or you just read it. But once my uncle said, ‘Hey, you can put your own stuff in this book,’ that's when my writing actually started. Looking at it now, some of the stuff is really little kiddie: The drawings, a dog, a cat, and a canary going to Kalamazoo, that kind of stuff.” But these poems and stories were the beginning of Linnea’s life as a poet.

Linnea's love of writing helped her connect more in school.

"School got better in sixth grade. I had a teacher who was focused in on writing, which made it better. My teacher loved to read and write. I was definitely engaged in sixth grade."

Linnea's mother also graduated from college when Linnea was in sixth grade.

"Going to my mom's graduation was a big part of my growing up," Linnea said. "It took her as long to get her Bachelor's degree as it did for me to go through elementary school. It had been a big fight, but in the end, it was kind of cool to go through that with her."

Linnea took dance classes all through elementary school and junior high. In high school, she found that the classes that were most engaging to her were the ones in which she was able to be creative.

"I got to high school, and there were the arts, and there was choir, and there were things to do that are creative," Linnea said. "And I stayed engaged. Not in every class, of course. In those classes where you're just filling out worksheets, I would be out to lunch. I had a whole class I don't even remember except that my boyfriend was in that class."

Being in choir was a watershed experience for Linnea.

"My high school choir teacher was rebellious," she said. "He broke a lot of rules, had his own rules, did his own thing. He didn't subscribe to the idea that a choir has to sing classical music. He was really big into the idea that popular music is just as important, just as valid, as classical music. You don't have to just sing prim and proper songs to be a singer. He made our shows just amazing 'cause he wanted to. And it wasn't, like, stand still and sing, it was like, "Oh, we're gonna be fabulous! And we're gonna rip off the gowns and have gowns underneath!" Or rip off the nun outfit or the choir robes. He would really go for it."

“I didn’t have a lot of teachers like that,” Linnea continued. “I’d had a pretty traditional education, for the most part. Those rule breakers were the teachers I liked. What I learned in choir played into the punk rock and underground influences in my life on the other side of education. I’m like, ‘Okay, I’m gonna be human.’”

After high school, Linnea went to a four-year university that was far enough from her home to feel like she was going away but close enough that she could zip home if she felt like it. In college, Linnea was able to immerse herself in her passions: She majored in English and minored in dance. After college, Linnea was unsure of what she wanted to do. “I wanted to write. I wanted to dance and perform. But my family is pretty conservative about that. They said I needed to have a job. All I heard was *be a teacher, be a teacher, be a teacher.* I heard it enough that I was like, ‘Okay!’”

Not sure whether to teach in a private school with an arts emphasis, in a public one with a traditional comprehensive academic program, or at a dance school, Linnea sought guidance and direction from outside her family, friend, and academic circle.

“I went to a psychic.”

The psychic told Linnea that she would have more impact in a public school than she would at a private school or just teaching dancers or just teaching artists.

“He was saying, ‘If you're like the wise hermit on the hill and you stay away from the people, you don't share the knowledge with the people, you need to be around others to share and get more wise ultimately.’ It's so silly, but for my 20-year-old self, it made sense. And that set me on the public school path.”

Wade

Wade was born into a military family, the fourth child in a family of six children – five boys and a girl. Since his father was in the Navy, Wade's childhood was punctuated with frequent family moves. "I was born in San Diego, and we bounced between San Diego and Hawaii for a few years, then to North Carolina, and back to Hawaii," Wade said. "My family life was pretty stable – my parents had a solid marriage – but life was still chaotic, with us having to pick up every three years and move, having to make new friends and everything else like that."

Hawaii is considered a tropical paradise, but Wade described living there as traumatic. "I was a minority there. I was the white person in the Hawaiian culture, and the Hawaiian culture is all upset that we (Americans) took over their islands. So they picked on the *haoles*, and I was one. I was also a small kid, and they picked on me for that too."

Being bullied caused Wade to develop anxiety. Walking home after school became a daily concern, because even the smallest distance between school and the safety of home and family presented opportunities to be picked on. Wade recalled, "I worried about whether or not I'd have to walk home and, if someone was going to pick me up from school, who would be there. Would it be my dad or my mom?" Wade's father encouraged his son to make at least part of the journey home on his own. "He always wanted me to walk just a short distance away from school to meet him. He'd encourage me, 'Go down here and walk through this gate, and I'll be over here.'"

Wade's family was reassigned to a base in North Carolina for a couple of years, and then they returned to Hawaii when Wade entered junior high. This time, Wade was careful to minimize his potential for being bullied by making friends with students who were left alone by

the bullies. "The Japanese kids didn't get picked on so much," Wade said. "I made friends with them."

Wade's Japanese friends had a significant influence on his life.

"All my friends in Hawaii were Japanese and came from straight-up Japanese homes. Shoes off, speak Japanese. I learned some Japanese from them and would have been fluent if we'd stayed in Hawaii longer. I remember wearing kimonos. I was immersed in the culture, and it became part of me. I was just following what everybody else was doing."

While Wade was doing well socially during his second time in Hawaii, he struggled academically.

"I was behind," he said. "I probably had a slight learning disability of some sort. My math skills were low, so I had to go into a special math class that was like an RSP class but wasn't RSP – they didn't have RSP in Hawaii. I was a squirrely kid, probably out to lunch. I was probably that kid that's just drifting through."

Just as Wade was entering high school, his father was transferred again, this time to a base in southern California. After being immersed in Japanese culture and finding connections in Hawaii, Wade felt out of his element in California.

"It was a culture shock coming back to white-bread Orange County where we weren't the minority anymore," Wade said. However, this time, he was better able to handle the transition and adjust to his new high school.

"There were the usual jerks in school, but other than that, things were pretty normal. It was like, 'Wow, things are starting to even out.' I matured more, started hanging out with the right people. It just started to become normal. After just *trying* to fit in, starting to *actually* fit in was a pretty big thing."

Wade's social life was improving. His new town had a thriving social scene for high school students, with dances almost every weekend at the Teen Center and nearby beaches that were perfect and popular for surfing. Wade and his friends kept an active social calendar, but academically, he struggled and lacked direction regarding what classes he should be taking in high school and what options he might have after graduation.

"I didn't know what I was doing in high school," Wade said. "My parents didn't know what I was doing in high school. They weren't educated, weren't college grads. They had no clue about college entrance requirements and, when it came to my plans after high school, they were just sort of, 'Well, what do you wanna do?'"

In his junior year, Wade started dating a girl named Linda. Linda was a strong student who got excellent grades, and her studious qualities and aspirations for college influenced Wade.

"Linda absorbed every minute of my life," he said. "I actually did better in school while I was dating her. She was a really good student – went straight to UCLA out of high school – and she helped me with my trig, my geometry."

Linda and her family helped Wade get on an academic track at school that would make him eligible for college.

"Linda's parents were younger than mine, and they knew more about those kinds of things," Wade said. "I ended up finally getting back on board. I was on track to study architecture in college. I'd taken some drafting courses. I took a lot of wood shop. I liked working with my hands and wood."

After graduating from high school. Wade enrolled at the local community college.

"I took more architecture classes at the junior college, but I crapped out when it got to be too much because of all the math. I mean, I got to calculus, and six weeks in, I was trying to keep my head afloat. I couldn't do it."

Two years later, Wade applied to transfer to a four-year school so he could finish his Bachelor's degree. He applied for admission to Cal Poly Pomona, but he did not get accepted.

"I felt stupid that I couldn't get into college," Wade remembered. "I had a 3.0 GPA. I should have had everything to go to State. But architecture was an impacted major, and they were only taking the cream of the crop. I could have gone in as a liberal arts major and then changed over once I got there like some people did, but I didn't know that strategy. I was too young, not knowing where to go, not knowing what to do."

Wade stayed at the community college and studied architecture, for two more years. He eventually transferred to a state university to complete his degree.

"It took me nine years to finish school," he said. "I changed majors four times, thought about going into petroleum engineering and nautical engineering."

Travel was what drew Wade to these industries. He loved to travel, loved the idea of seeing the world. In middle school, he had taken a career aptitude quiz and gotten the job of "airline steward" as his ideal career. The idea of being paid to travel was planted firmly in Wade's head, and it seemed like a good plan. "I could be a nautical engineer and work on a ship. Or a petroleum engineer – the guys that drive those tankers work 30 days on and 30 days off. I could be on the sea for 30 days, and then I could have 30 days off and travel. Or I could drive a cruise ship and travel around."

Wade laughed and shrugged. "Looking back now, thank God I didn't get into any of those careers. I probably would have run the ship aground like that guy did in Italy, or I would

have died of some bacterial infection on the cruise ship. Instead, I ended up with a degree in business."

In the years that followed, Wade went through a succession of jobs that paid a decent wage. It did not matter to him if the work was interesting as long as he made money. Living in close proximity to some of Orange County's most exclusive and socioeconomically advantaged cities had influenced him: "I was an '80s' kid. The '80s were all about the money, the stock markets, houses, the housing market, and all that. A job was a means to earn money, 'cause you *have* to have money."

"I worked at a golf course. I worked at a hardware store. I worked at an architectural place. I worked at a travel agency. I worked at selling first aid and safety supplies. I worked at Federal Express. I worked at a leasing office for an apartment complex. I worked at a sporting goods store that specialized in camping equipment. I worked at Xerox – my dad worked there after he got out of the service, so I kind of followed his lead. I worked at Three-Day Blinds selling window shades to people. And then I was a contracted worker for the County of Orange, got to work at the offices downtown."

The money at the county office was good. Wade's life was getting good too: Besides making money, he was dating a woman named Brenda, and the two had been talking seriously about getting married.

And then, in one day, everything changed.

"My contract with the county ended, and I got let go. I lost my place to live on the same day." When Wade had gotten home from work that day, he discovered that his roommate had moved out of state without giving any sort of advance notice. Wade had no income to pay for

the apartment on his own, and he did not know how soon he would be able to bring in a new roommate. "I didn't know what was going on or what I was going to do."

Out of work and with the lease running out on the apartment in a few days, Wade made a desperate move.

"I called up Brenda, told her we weren't going to get married. I'm breaking up," Wade recalled. "And I moved to Seattle to see if I could make a go of it there. That was miserable."

To get by, Wade took any temporary work he could get. He finally found steady work with Amtrak, working as a car attendant on the long-distance train routes. "I was riding the train on the way back from visiting my brother in Chicago," Wade said. "I talked to the attendant for my car, did some networking, met his boss. We were stuck in the middle of a snowstorm for 26 hours at one point, so we had plenty of time to talk. By the time we got back to Seattle, I had a job working on the train."

"Working on the train was hard work. It was weird," Wade said. "People on the train are like carnies. It's like seasonal carny work, and the people are a mismatch of weird, weird people. I don't do well with weird people. Weird people make me feel insecure, and it's like I need to feel like I'm with a normal group."

The pace of the job was exhausting too. "You weren't supposed to sit down," Wade recalled. "You were supposed to walk your car and take care of everybody. I asked the chief if I could have a break one day, and he said, 'What?! You don't get a break!' I slunk back to the very back of my car. I could barely keep my eyes open. The sun was coming in, and it was a beautiful day, so beautiful. All I could think was, 'This sucks.'"

On a Seattle to Los Angeles run, Wade got off in LA and did not get back on the train. "My beeper rang and said to report to the station. I didn't, so they fired me. I was fine with it. I

basically told them to F-O. Then I called Brenda and said I was coming home." Within two weeks of being back in Orange County, Wade found a job at GTE and got engaged to Brenda.

"Things started to even out after we got married," Wade said.

Thoughtful Spot

What shapes your life?
Different doors open
and close. All these doors

opening and closing.

You don't know what is going on,
You're just walking through those doors.
You're not making decisions consciously,
you're not making decisions.
You're being influenced by a door that's open.
You're being walked through the door because
you're at that age where you just do what
people will tell you to do.
No one told you what was going on.

But…

When you look back in your life

and you think about it

you look back at

what doors open,

what doors close,

how you're exposed.

It's weird.

You look at all those things and you go,

"Wow."

What got you into education?

It's just that the doors closed. You don't know why but

the doors close, and doors open.

You didn't plan on this door opening for education.

You never really excelled at anything.

You know how that is.

But you start to grow up, and you realize

You're always harder on yourself.

"You're afraid to do anything.

You're afraid to do this."

But you never really think about how

you don’t know what other people think about you.

Kris

Kris grew up in southern California. Her family was Armenian. “We had a really strong culture growing up,” Kris said.

Armenians were a minority in Kris’ community, and this posed some challenges when Kris was in school.

“Growing up an Armenian kid, you’d hear people talk about ethnicities and talk about what they are. I'd always heard, ‘Well, what are you?’ When I would say I was Armenian, I always got the answer back, ‘What's that?’ Every Armenian kid that's my age now grew up hearing, ‘What's that?’ That sticks in my head a lot, I think. I think it was more of an ignorance thing. I wasn't bullied because of being Armenian, but I got bullied because of my name.”

“I wasn't very good at school,” Kris said. “I had fun, but I was the kid that always joked around and played around and didn't really care much about grades.” She did like to read, though, and her mother encouraged her daughter’s interest by letting her order any and as many books as she desired from the monthly book club orders that Kris’ teacher sent home. Today, decades later, she still has many of these books at her home.

Kris described her child self as a tomboy. She loved helping her father with jobs around the house and in the garage. She even worked on the family cars with her father, helping him change the oil and do regular maintenance. Kris also hated wearing dresses, which she said became problematic because of a school rule.

“We had to wear dresses.”

Kris wore pants to school anyway and got in trouble. “They called my mother in for a conference to ask my mother if I had any dresses. And my mother said, ‘Yeah, she doesn't like 'em.’ It was probably the happiest day of my life was when they finally said the girls didn't have to wear dresses any more to school. I never wore another one.”

In high school, Kris gained a mentor in her PE teacher and tennis coach, Ms. Stacey.

“I didn’t make a very good first impression,” Kris recounted. “I was laughing with some of my friends on campus, and there was some nasty word coming out of my mouth as this teacher walked by. I guess, for whatever reason, she decided that she needed to fix me."

“Ms. Stacey knew I wasn't a bad kid, but she kept me out of trouble. If I ever even *thought* about getting in trouble, she knew about it somehow.”

Ms. Stacey cultivated a relationship with Kris that evolved from a student-teacher dynamic to a student-mentor/advocate dynamic. After coaching Kris on the tennis team, Ms. Stacey encouraged her to join the swim team in spite of not knowing how to swim. Kris learned to swim so that she could be on the team and then continued on the team for all four years of high school. She became such a strong swimmer, in fact, that she became a lifeguard.

Ms. Stacey also advocated for Kris when the opportunity arose to go to Washington, D.C. on a school trip.

“I really wanted to go,” Kris said, “but I knew my parents would never let me. They were never gonna let me out of their sight.” Ms. Stacey advocated to Kris’ parents to allow Kris to go on the trip, and later, when Kris asked if she could go, they consented. “They let me go because of her.”

“Ms. Stacey was my very first mentor in my life ever,” Kris said. “I wanted to be just like her. I wanted to be a teacher because of her.”

Kris went to see her high school guidance counselor about what she would need to do to become a teacher, but her counselor scoffed at her aspirations and was dismissive of her.

"Oh, you know, I wouldn't do that," Kris recalled the counselor saying as he leaned back in his chair. "You're not gonna really be able to get a job, you know?"

And with that, Kris' aspirations of becoming a teacher were shot. After graduating from high school, she drifted around, unsure of what to do or where to go. College was no longer a priority or even a considered option. "Someone convinced me not to be a teacher, so what was the point?" Kris explained.

Kris decided to take a few classes at a nearby community college, choosing classes that sounded fun or interesting.

"I took a biology class. I took music appreciation. I took music theory,' Kris recounted.

Even at the college level, the social aspects of education were motivating to Kris.

"I took a creative writing class four times," she said. "They let you repeat that class, and there was this crazy drunk professor who made it really fun. He would come in, and we all knew this guy was hammered. One time, he came in and laid himself across the table like the Calvin Klein commercial. We all just died! He was pretty fun, and I met a really nice group of people. We took the class together two or three times, and we became friends."

When Kris got bored of her community college courses, she took a job at a grocery store, but after a while, she was fired. "I didn't like the grocery store. When I don't like something, I don't do a very good job at it anymore. I wasn't doing a very good job anymore, and I lost that job."

Unemployed, Kris was driving around her hometown when she passed an Armed Forces recruiting office.

"I'd never really thought about the military before," she said. "I was like, 'Oh, that looks like a good idea,' and that's pretty much how I enlisted."

Kris enlisted in the Air Force and spent three and a half years on active duty. Her service took her to Texas and England, and while she enjoyed her time there, she hated being so far from her family.

"I missed home a lot, and I knew that my job wasn't ever gonna bring me back to California or even the west coast. There was one position in Nevada, but that required a much higher rank that would take me a while to achieve. Sure, there were cool places to go with the Air Force, but I missed my family, so I just decided I needed to get out."

Kris was honorably discharged in August and returned to southern California. Her sister had a desk job at UPS and helped Kris get a seasonal job as a holiday delivery driver. The seasonal stint turned into 10 years. Kris left when the job became too mundane. "Again, when I don't like something anymore, I don't do a very good job at it," she laughed.

Kris' unemployment happened during an El Niño season, which, in California, is characterized by a warmer than usual winter accompanied by unusually heavy rains. The weather wreaked havoc on the region with flooding, crazier-than-usual traffic, and landslides. The ocean life off of California's coast were affected as well.

"Seals and sea lions were having a tough time," Kris explained. "They were washing up on the shore. It was pretty bad. I love animals, and seeing all this happen to them was really bothering me."

Kris' friends tired of hearing her talk about the climate's effect on sea life. One was pretty blunt about her annoyance.

"Shut up about it," Kris recalled her friend saying. "Just shut up about it. Or call Sea World and see if there's something you can go do instead of just talking about it."

Kris did just that. Sea World connected her with an organization in Orange County, which was much closer to Kris' home. "I called them and told them my story, and they said to come on down."

Kris worked at Friends of the Sea Lion as a volunteer and loved her job. The job was tough: "I got pooped on and bitten, and you're wrestling with the animals to get them to eat," Kris recalled. The animals were not domesticated and had to remain so. The scientists and volunteers had to be careful not to develop relationships with the animals or let the animals imprint upon them, because that would affect their ability to return to the wild after rehabilitation.

As gratifying as the work was, Kris' volunteer position was not paying the bills.

"The only person getting paid was the supervising marine biologist," Kris said. "I'm like, 'If I'm gonna get pooped on, maybe getting paid would be a good thing.' That inspired me to go back to school."

With the goal of transferring to a four-year university and becoming a marine biologist, Kris enrolled at a community college. One class, taken during her first semester, changed everything: Geology. The professor was very engaging and took his class into the field to observe firsthand what they had been studying. Kris was fascinated – and hooked. When she transferred to State University, she declared as a geology major and, after graduation, worked for several different companies as a field geologist.

"Then I decided, for some reason, that I wanted a Master's degree," Kris said. "I went to State, met with my advisor, and we agreed we'd work together. She was also the department

chair, and she said, 'If you come and work here, it'll make this whole Master's thing a little bit easier.'"

Kris accepted a position at State at the geology lab technician. The salary was a pay cut from what she had been making as a field geologist, but she got to work in the scientific field she loved, work with and right across the hall from her advisor, and work toward her Master's degree in Geology.

The lab tech job was also a pivotal point for Kris: Her experiences in this position led to the realization that her first dream of being a teacher was not just a dream – it was a passion, it was something she had to do, and it was within reach:

I worked at State University as a lab tech.
I did everything that wasn't a computer.
I set up labs,
I kept track of equipment,
I purged a lot of equipment,
I got to order a couple of four-wheel-drive vehicles,
I started training people.
I met a geochemistry professor, and
I really liked him.
I liked his style.
I told him I thought maybe I wanted to teach. When
I was done with all my classes but
I was still working on my thesis,

I went to work for him at the community college

where he taught.

When I was done with my thesis,

I went over to State University's campus safety office where

I was the safety training officer.

I didn't get along very well in this office.

I was used to being in my own world.

I was not a hang-out-around-the-water-cooler kind of person, but they told me

I needed to spend more time around the water cooler.

I never made it past my first review.

I quit.

I remember looking at this guy and going "You've got to be kidding me."

I'm like

"I have work to do."

I was used to working like that

I'm like "You knew who you got."

I worked in a room all by myself,

I had my work done by 11 in the morning, and

I spent the rest of time working on my graduate work. Here,

I was starting to realize

I *needed* to be a teacher.

Kris talked to the geochemistry professor she had befriended about the possibility of becoming a K-12 teacher.

"No, no, no!" Kris recalled him saying. "Don't do it! You're gonna be miserable."

"Why do you say that?" Kris asked him.

"You're gonna be teaching lower than you wanna be teaching," the professor said. "Look at *me*."

The professor, Kris explained, had really wanted to be at a four-year university. The friends with whom he had been in his doctoral program were all working at universities and were doing research. The professor had chosen a different career path: Teaching at community college. Even though he made much more money teaching at the community college than his friends did teaching university, the professor did not get to do research, as it was not a priority of the college, and he was generally unsatisfied with his career.

Kris thought about her own life and career.

"I'm gonna do it," she said. And she enrolled in an online teaching credential program.

Figure 5

***Satellites and Orbits of the Las Colinas Universe*; acrylic, pastel, and mixed-media on canvas**

Spatial Considerations

While all relationships could be considered collegial since all teachers on faculty work together at Las Colinas, some collegial relationships overlapped into being personal as well, with the teachers in these relationships interacting with one another socially outside of school. Three personal relationships among faculty members predated the teachers' tenure at Las Colinas: Two teachers were neighbors, two had worked together at a different school in the Arroyo Seco district, and two had gone to junior high and high school together and had been good friends at that time. The other personal relationships had developed from collegial relationships, in which the teachers had interacted at school and subsequently interacted socially outside of school.

Collegial relationships were frequently insular. In two cases, the collegial relationships were restricted to the buildings where the teachers had their classrooms.

Science Teachers on the Edge

The sociogram painting showed that three science teachers work together in collaboration but do not interact with teachers – of science or any other subject – outside of their three-classroom building. Indeed, these teachers are rarely seen on campus: During a focus group, participant Wade even joked about how he "actually saw Zamora," one of the teachers in this building, on a particular day and had been surprised at the sighting. Several spatial factors contribute to the isolation of these three teachers.

The placement of this building near the faculty parking lot and the building's design and amenities make it possible for the teachers in this building to remain insulated from campus and colleagues all day. The teachers enter this building directly from the parking lot, so they can park their cars directly outside their classroom building and come and go from campus without being noticed or interacting with colleagues or students. A large office and prep area in the

middle of the building connects all three classrooms. Since the science teachers in this building have equipped this space with a refrigerator and microwave, they do not need to leave the building to go to the lunchroom or to get a snack. The teachers do not even need to leave the building to use the restroom: Of all the classroom buildings on campus, this science building is the only one that has its own interior restroom exclusively for faculty use.

The layout of the overall school campus also contributes to these teachers' isolation. The science department has classrooms spread throughout campus with three classrooms being in the dead center of campus, one being on its own and not near any other science classrooms, and three being in the building on the edge of campus. Kris' stories indicate that the campus layout and the lack of proximity between science classrooms affects the department's ability to engage in collaboration – and, arguably, function.

The Math Island

The sociogram painting showed that Las Colinas Junior High School's math department keeps mostly to themselves in their own building. They collaborate on lesson plans, as the curriculum that the district has adopted in support of the Common Core State Standards requires completion of certain modules, and the math teachers have been to several trainings on implementation and are expected to be working more or less in tandem with one another throughout the school year. The math teachers interact with one another socially at lunch time, meeting in their building's central department office, where there are a refrigerator and microwave. Aside from going to the main office to check their mailboxes or leaving their classrooms to use the restroom, the seven math teachers stay within their building during the school day. The math building, in the sociogram painting, is an island of blue collegial relationships.

The math department's insularity is facilitated by the school's layout. The teacher lunch room is on the opposite side of campus – a five- to seven-minute walk through crowds of students during the lunch break. The main office, adjacent to the math building, once had a secondary teachers' lounge which housed copy machines and the teachers' mailboxes, but that was eliminated several years ago as the school's population bloomed, and rooms on campus were repurposed to maximize classroom space. It is likely that, given the options of staying in their building or spending half their lunch time navigating a campus filled with hungry middle school students, the math teachers keep to themselves out of convenience and to maximize their limited time on lunch break.

The layout of the math building makes the teachers' choice to stay in a simple one as well: A central department office runs the width of the building and connects four classrooms. While the remaining three classrooms of teachers in the department are not attached to this office, the proximity to classrooms that do allows the three teachers in those rooms to access the department office easily.

In sum, analysis of spatial divides on campus revealed that Kris' department chair was correct when she cited proximity issues as the reason for a lack of departmental collaboration. The school's buildings' design, the campus layout, and the placement of teachers on a space-available basis rather than a departmental basis influence departmental and interdisciplinary collaborations. Additionally, the school's design and layout make it possible for some teachers to disengage completely from even the most casual faculty interactions.

Entre'acte

It's high noon, and the bell rings for lunch. Students swarm out of their classrooms into the brilliant sunlight of the California autumn. Those who buy lunch race for the speedlines so they can be through the cafeteria before their desired items sell out. Others stampede to the blacktop to claim a court for today's pick-up basketball game. A tumult of students crowd in the quad, their chatter sending up a tremendous hubbub. Some students scribble furiously on worksheets in frantic attempts to finish last night's homework before the next class. A table of boys resume their Yu Gi Oh game that they had started before school and paused for morning classes. Young couples hold hands and scan the quad for supervising administrators before stealing a surreptitious kiss.

The teacher lunchroom is empty.

Chapter 6: The Culture

The Elephant in the Room

We are all here for students.

And yet…

We're shamed into not being able to say,

"I'm also here for me."

If we talk about things that we need
as teachers, that's somehow frowned upon
or not okay.
Our teacher needs are down here and
student needs are up here.

We have to have our own needs met.

Personal Brand

What does it mean to be

an educator

a superintendent

a public figure

today?

You have to market yourself.

You have to.

(You mean you *don't* want to work on your personal brand?)

You're competing against charter schools

and other things.

It wasn't like that 20 years ago.

It wasn't like that *five* years ago.

Now people – teachers, even – are way more under the microscope.

School of Choice

Our district offers school of choice.

What are the options?

Choose perceptions:

Prestige

A “better” school

(What does that even mean?)

Opportunities

Your electives

Your future

Or not.

“That elective’s closed.

We’re sorry.”

But what if…?

That kid’s an amazing…

That’s not fair.

“The classes are set.

Too bad.”

So choose a new reality:

An elective you did not want

Riding the bus an hour each way

(No after school activities for you!)

Biased expectations

No accommodation

Is this what you want? To be lost in the shuffle?

To not have the opportunities the students who live here do?

Choice implies freedom implies liberation.

Are you really better off?

“We’re Going to be Transparent”

I’ve heard rumors.

The district is trying to nourish the thing of

them

against

us,

administration

versus

teachers.

That rumor is not a rumor.

It’s actually happening.

When I heard the words,

“We’re going to be transparent,”

I’m thinking,

“You’re going to tell me what you think I want to hear.

You’re going to go ahead and do whatever you’re going to do.

Even if you ask for my input.

(So why do you ask for my input?)”

You Don't Bring Me Flowers Anymore

Nobody was ever more grateful to have a job

with Arroyo Seco than I was when I got hired.

I dove in with everything I had.

At first, I was a little naïve about things.

Maybe I was on the good side, but

the minute you say the wrong thing,

the minute you do the wrong thing,

you end up on the other side.

I don't trust people I use to call my friends, and

that's not a really good place to be.

So now, it means I'm always looking outside.

I want to be happy, and it means I'm not married to the district.

Conflicted

I said no today.

It was so difficult, because

I genuinely like my principal,

I know what it's like to be in a bind,

I want to help her out, and

I want to keep up good relations

(Because nothing around here happens

without them).

But I think of everything on my plate,

Piled precariously with papers –

Student papers to be graded

Purple papers for the college newsletter

The school paper needing to go to the printer

Papers representing bills I must pay –

And my eyelids grow heavy with the weight of

Too much at once.

I suggested an alternate,

A former student

whose high school teacher didn't recommend him

for this task.

I wonder why?

I wonder the same wonderings I wonder

for so many of my former students:

Do your teachers see in you all the developing, imperfect beauty I see in you?

Invisible Obstacles

My students have a lot of anxiety

about grades. Even when

I do a project that's very open,

they're always like, "How'm I gonna get my grade?"

Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!

I want you to think deeply and be creative.

Grade! Grade! Grade!

How do I get my grade?

(A good one?)

The mindset is a challenge.

Students

Parents

Teachers

Shifts

It's a different time.

Dynamics shift.

Dynamics shift, and sometimes

they don't stay at that optimum for a while.

There's this peak,

then it stays,

then it moves.

It's hard to sustain.

There's so much change around us constantly.

It's really hard to have anything that's consistent.

Teachers change, leaders change.

You never know if the administration is going to change.

Five years, five principals.

The APs change,

a lot of the older teachers have retired,

the young ones coming up have different ways

of being teachers.

Funding comes and goes.

Electives come and go.

“May the Odds Be Ever in Your Favor!”

We had a weird creepy elective meeting with admin

that we always have once a year. It’s like,

“Here, it’s the *Hunger Games!*

May the odds be ever in your favor!”

We called out our administrators.

“You’re putting us against the other.”

They instantly dismissed it.

“*We’re* not putting you.”

Well, somebody is.

Admin?

The district?

We all feel a need to compete.

The district’s looking at it from a business sense.

(Money prevails first.)

We’re looking at it from an educational sense.

The whole thing is a chess game.

I play it that way; some people don’t.

(They’re not thinking.)

If you don’t watch out,

you'll be the pawn that gets taken off the chess board.

You'll be the tribute, shining in the sky of the arena.

It's awful.

It's awful.

They do things like that,

and you're like,

"Apparently, I can't trust anyone."

You can't trust

your administration

the other teachers

the students

You want to trust people, but

the bottom line is

you're gonna look out for your best interest.

It's awful.

It's awful.

But I can't say anything.

If I do, I get repercussions.

I'm tired.

Chess Moves

Wade rounded the corner to his classroom to see the school's hired muralist cordoning off space in front of the blank wall outside Matt Harper's room. A canvas tarp had been spread along the length of the building, and several buckets of paint were stacked nearby.

Wade didn't think anything of it. The muralist had been a common sight at Las Colinas this year, since the PTSA had paid for murals to beautify the otherwise austere cinderblock walls. There was a big one in the quad that depicted the Las Colinas bear mascot, Oso. A mural outside the band and choir classrooms showed a bar of music stretching between the two doors, with bear paw prints for music notes. At the front of the school, a mural welcomed visitors to campus with "LAS COLINAS OSOS ARE COLLEGE AND CAREER READY!" Wade thought it would be nice to see a colorful mural instead of the drab gray bricks in the hall.

The next morning, Wade went by the mural before going to his classroom, and what he saw stopped him cold.

Two weeks earlier, Matt Harper, the art teacher, had come into Wade's room with a sketch he had made of a bear surrounded by logos represented the various arts classes offered at Las Colinas: An artist's palette, a camera, a dancing figure, a spotlight, a tuba, and a treble clef. A red ribbon fluttered above and below the bear:

LAS COLINAS OSOS

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

"Hey, I have this line drawing," Matt said, thrusting the paper into Wade's hand. "Can you turn this into a digital graphic for me? Like on Illustrator?"

Wade admired the logo. "What's it for?"

"It's a logo for VAPA," Matt said. "Maybe one of your multimedia kids could mock it up?"

Wade nodded. "Yeah, sure. I can put a kid on this."

"Thanks, man! I owe you."

The next day, Wade gave the logo to a student who was done with her project and wanted to do some extra credit. She spent the next week working on the graphic – first scanning Matt's line drawing, then manipulating the image in Illustrator, typing and adjusting the text until the font closely matched Matt's drawn lettering – until it looked polished and professional. Wade printed the final graphic and took it over to Matt.

"Oh, that's rad," Matt said. "Thanks, man!"

This morning, that graphic loomed large in its painted form on the wall before Wade. He felt his stomach flop over, then a steely rage set in.

Are you fucking kidding me?

His stomach clenched into a knot, Wade went to his classroom. He went through his day, class by class, somehow managing not to take his foul mood out on his students. But the rage simmered all morning, and every time Wade went into the hall to monitor the passing periods, he saw the mural outside Matt's room – the mural with the art that *he* and *his* student had worked so painstakingly to digitize – and he felt like punching someone or something. All that effort and no credit.

After lunch, Wade felt calmer. His students had been cooperative all day, and he was proud of the progress they were making on their public service announcement posters. The back

end of the day, only two class periods, seemed manageable, and then he could go home, work on his motorcycle, have dinner with Brenda…

And then, as he was locking his classroom door for the day, he spotted Matt Harper out of the corner of his eye, and the rage came back like an avalanche.

Wade stormed across the hall.

"What the hell is this?!" he exploded.

"Wade, man, what's…"

"What the hell is this?"

"A VAPA mural."

"No shit, Sherlock. You've got all the other classes. Where's multimedia?"

Matt shrugged. "You're in CTE."

"I digitized this image for you," Wade huffed. "I put a kid on it, and she spent a week. You couldn't have thrown me a bone and included my class when you knew you were making it into a mural? You've looked out for me in the past."

"You're in CTE, man," Matt repeated. "You guys get everything already. VAPA, we don't."

"You couldn't have made a VAPA *and* a CTE mural? Promoted both? You know how electives here struggle."

"Sorry, man…" Matt locked his classroom door and headed out to the parking lot.

Wade locked his own door and hoisted his teacher bag onto his shoulder. As he walked out to his Mercedes, he thought about Matt and the mural. Part of him felt bad for going off on his colleague as he did. Matt *did* do a lot for the school. He coached volleyball, and the volleyball teams always took home the championship trophies in the district's intramural

tournament. Matt's students consistently placed in the county's art show and were selected for exhibition in the big summer arts festival. Matt also opened his room to students every day at lunch, letting them play their own music on his speakers and connecting YouTube to his big display screens so the students could watch and dance along to K-Pop videos.

Matt said CTE gets everything, Wade thought. *I get where he's coming from. I think he's got into this point where he's starting to be like, "I do a great job here, and I don't get any recognition."*

Wade unlocked his car and got in. He paused, staring at his steering wheel as his thoughts continued.

There's a lot of people here that are like that. A lot of people talk like that, that people don't know or recognize what they do. And I could do the same thing. I mean, I *don't get recognition, even though I do some pretty cool curriculum for the kids. But I don't waste my energy ruminating on it. I don't have the time to be that upset about something that I really don't have a lot of control over. I don't get recognition, but I'm not going to screw people over it.*

Wade turned the key. The dashboard lit up as the car's engine turned over. As Wade idled past the hallway entrance to leave, he caught a glimpse of Matt's mural, and his stomach tightened.

Where We Are Now

Sometimes

people end up being quiet and loners

because they don't like the situation they're in.

They don't know who they can trust.

You don't know who you can trust.

It's hard to know who you can trust when you feel like

people around you are

disintegrating

falling apart

not like-minded.

Sometimes

I'd rather just be in my four walls.

I'm very limited at this point on who I want to associate with.

My circle of who I want to associate with is getting

smaller

and

smaller.

It's not getting bigger and bigger.

Why?

People get complacent.

They just want to do the same thing over and over and

not change

with the kids.

So I don't mind being a loner,

it's less stressful.

Out

People have been trying to break me

Schedule

Teaching load

Bureaucratic entanglements

Administrative corralling

Walking campus used to be like walking in a war zone.

Now it is like stumbling through a hostile forest

in a weird, waking-dream state.

Who is my friend?

Am I being set up?

I don't trust my brain anymore:

What I'm perceiving

How I'm reacting

What I'm saying or doing

Am I appropriate?

Do I may any sense?

If they want you out,

they'll make it happen

Set you up for failure

Like jumping repeatedly on a rigid board

Until it breaks. Then

they can blame you,

trample your name and reputation

Until

you leave quietly in shame.

There is no dignity here.

I seek outs:

A different job I don't have the brain or strength for

A winning lottery ticket

An illness

Anything

I can't remember things now

My students' names

Where I put things

When things are

Because Reasons

It seems like
people are really afraid
to let people know what
they're doing.

I don't know why.
Maybe I know why.
I think *maybe* I know why:
There's been a lot of pressure put on people to be at some standard.

If we don't feel like
we're at that standard,
asking for help or
collaborating
might seem more like a weakness
than a strength.

I totally see collaboration as a strength.

But if you feel like
you're not coming into a collaboration at the same level...

We've all been there,

I think,

where you walk into a group and you're like,

"Why am I here?

I shouldn't be here with these people."

You forge ahead and

you do what

you want to,

but

if somebody really feels that way and

they're forced in that collaborative setting, then

I don't think you're gonna get much out of 'em.

It has to really be a trust thing.

We pick and choose the teachers

that are gonna come and work with us.

There are no egos,

mine included.

Preservation of Self and Sanity

There are days I shut my door.

I can hear kids outside, so I put on Amazon music.

I get the music up high enough that I don't hear

the kids. It's not that I don't like kids, but

my brain needs a minute, and

I feel like I don't get a minute ever.

I try not to give lessons where I deliberately am keeping distance.

I'm engaged with the students all the time,

so on lunch breaks,

as much as I'd love to sit around and talk with any of you,

I need that minute

to just go "Huhhhhhhh" and sit at my desk.

Relationship Soup I

The faculty lounge is no longer there.

It's physically there, of course.

But no one goes in there.

Now it's just a room,

An unused space.

People used to eat there.

The food was better.

There was certain food on certain days,

or you'd get free tots or whatever.

The faculty club used to do things in there too,

like cake for birthdays or a special lunch.

But it's different now.

It's separated.

Some people, you never see

come out. They just don't

come out. They don't make the effort.

Key people left last year, the dynamic shifts.

Some new teachers went into the lounge this year. They said

“I ate lunch all by myself in the lunchroom, and

somebody made fun of me for it.

I wanted to leave,

but by that point, I was there, and

I didn’t want to go all the way back to my classroom.

I just wanted to eat.”

It’s hard to get to the lounge.

There’s so many kids.

It’s like you can’t walk through the crowd of kids

to get to the lounge.

I used to go to the lounge

five-hundred kids ago.

I was in there off and on, but

I was always busy with clubs.

I had literally three days of clubs.

When I didn’t have clubs,

I just wanted some peace.

We have been given so much more to do,

so many more responsibilities, forms to complete.

Now we’re

a watcher

a keeper

a psych

It could be that people

(when it's lunch time)

just closed the door and go "Aaaaaaah!"

I can honestly tell you that's what I do.

I wish we could get people to come back in the faculty lounge,

start sitting around and talking.

I wish.

Social Club

I thought it was gonna be different when I joined it.

I get having money for things like flowers and cards, but

I really thought it was gonna be more of a social club,

like you get to know teachers in it.

No.

No.

When we try to get together after school,

you don't get too many people coming around.

We used to.

We used to do a once-a-month morning at IHOP before school.

We used to have breakfast.

We used to have breakfast

monthly

then weekly.

I don't know.

I think there's too much work to do.

Thoughts Upon Linda's Retirement

The principal's secretary retired. We had a huge party for her.
Teachers and administrators going back 20 years turned out for her.
And even then, current people didn't.
Zamora didn't show up,
Farrow didn't show up,
Clendenning didn't show up.
Matt and Hewson had sports
or they would have been there,
probably.

Maybe.

All of the new people,
I don't think they showed.

It'd be nice to have the staff
a little more social,
a little more
together,
like you could count on everybody to show up for something.
Linda touches everybody in the school.

If you can't pull the whole staff together for that,

for her retirement party,

for *her*,

geez!

When I retire,

how many people are still gonna be around who know me?

Is it the newbies that are gonna come to my retirement?

When I retire,

I better book something the size of a men's room

'cause that's all the people that's gonna show.

Square Peg

Teachers experience the confines of being the square peg
right alongside their students. They joined them
rather than become that authoritarian.

There was a point in my career where I could've become a monster,
where rules and order is more important than connections,
where "Memorize this" is more important than understanding things.
The first 10 years of my career were in No Child Left Behind.
I was with a principal who loved test scores and data.
I could have been like,

"It has to be law and order.

You have to listen.

You have to…"

There are people

who I think truly care about kids

who don't get how they come off to kids.

That makes me scared.
There are some teachers who really think they're helping kids
by being so authoritarian,

almost menacing, even.

They need to know

they gotta not slouch.

They’ve gotta know how to memorize.

I could see how, so easily, I could’ve turned like that.

There are teachers that buck the system by saying

“I care about kids.

I’m gonna do the right thing.

I’m gonna connect with them.”

I’m always trying to think about

am I coming off as a friend,

making sure you know

I care about you?

Group Dynamic

The dynamics of my department

may be as they are

because of some history

I don't know.

For years

and years

and years

and years

and years

and years

they've been used to people who don't wanna be involved,

so the chair just makes decisions.

All right, we're gonna do this.

All right, we're gonna do that.

All right, we're gonna check off boxes.

All right, we're gonna do this.

It keeps the group happy.

Architecture of Isolation

Kris walked down the long hallway, past the quad, the library, and the student store, to her department chair's classroom. This morning's late start meeting had, once again, been fraught with contention and disconnect: When the science teachers were not arguing amongst themselves about how to implement the new standards, they were talking about collaborations that one or two of them had done but were news to the rest of the department.

Kris wanted to collaborate with other teachers. Before coming to Las Colinas, she had heard that this was a great school where teachers regularly engaged across subject areas in dynamic ways, and it was the main reason that she had transferred there. But so far, Kris' experience at Las Colinas was disappointing; she had yet to witness any sort of collaboration within the science department, let alone the dynamic, interdisciplinary work she had heard about. On top of that disappointment, Kris felt isolated. She only saw some of her department colleagues on meeting days, and no one seemed interested in working with her, even when she tried bringing it up. Kris was frustrated. She questioned whether transferring to Las Colinas had truly been the right move for her.

Jennifer was Kris' department chair. Because the teachers' contract had been negotiated and approved to give department chairs open-ended tenure – what some teachers referred to as "the Supreme Court lifetime appointment" – Jennifer had been the science department chair for 18 years. Kris felt like she could talk to her pretty openly. After all, Jennifer had contacted Kris and encouraged her to transfer to Las Colinas, and their interactions at school had always been friendly. *I don't have a problem with Jennifer,* Kris thought. *I can tell her how I'm feeling.*

Kris went into Jennifer's classroom. No one was there. She turned to leave, when she heard a scuffle in the back prep room.

"I'm back here!" Jennifer's voice called.

Kris followed Jennifer's voice into the prep room. Jennifer was on a stepstool, pulling items out of cabinets and placing them on the already-full countertop.

"Hi, Kris," she said, rearranging some bottles on a shelf. "What's up?"

"Hey there. Do you have a moment? I'd like to talk to you about something."

Jennifer continued shuffling the bottles on the shelf. "Sure. What's up?"

Kris waited a moment. When it was clear that Jennifer was not going to pause what she was doing to talk to her, she continued.

"Well, you know," she began. "I'm feeling really disconnected in the department."

"Oh? How's that?" Jennifer came down from the stepstool and walked across the prep room, away from Kris, to a cabinet where she began pulling out triple-beam balances.

"Erm…" Kris moved closer to Jennifer. "I want to collaborate with other teachers in the department. I feel like there's collaboration going on, definitely here in your building, and the boys are over in the 800 building doing whatever, and Jason goes over there and collabs with them. I'm kind of the odd person out."

Jennifer continued to take the balances out of the cabinet. Without looking at Kris, she said, "Yeah. You know, it's really a proximity thing."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. Like here, Trevor and Sharma and I see each other all day long. I'm constantly going over to Sharma and asking her something, or Trevor's coming in here. We're always going back and forth and doing this and that, because our classrooms are connected." Jennifer cradled two balances and carried them into her classroom, calling over her shoulder, "It's probably the same thing with the guys in the 800 building."

“But that leaves me over here,” Kris said. Her classroom was between the two science buildings but not attached to either one. She was literally in the middle of the collaborations but not included in any of them.

Jennifer set the balances on one of the student lab tables. "I'm really sorry that you feel that way,” she said. She headed back into the prep room and called over her shoulder, “Really, it's a proximity thing."

Kris was taken aback by her department chair’s words.

“Well, okay,” she said. “I’ll let you go.”

Kris’ mind reeled as she walked back to her classroom.

So, I’m literally in the middle. I don’t know what’s going on in the department. I don’t know who spends money on what equipment, I don’t know what I’m allowed to use and what I can’t. Sharma always talks about how she spends her own money on supplies. Is that what I’m supposed to do? I’m out of the loop on collaborations, and apparently, because I’m in the middle, that’s my problem.

I just told my department chair that I don't feel part of this department. That should have meant something. And it didn’t mean anything. It was just “I’m sorry you feel that way.”

Maybe it's me. It could be me and the way I present stuff or whatever. But it’s pretty obvious that the people in this department aren't really interested to hear what I have to say.

I'm not really certain I even have much to offer at this point. Maybe I should quit.

Kris opened her classroom door, turned the key a second time to lock it, and pulled it firmly shut behind her. She paused for a moment, taking in the silence and solitude of her empty classroom.

I’ll just keep to myself over here.

Inservice Day

A group of coaches go across the street to the pancake house

every time we have the inservice day across town.

One of them is my friend.

I sent him a text while I sat in the auditorium,

"Are you here?

Or are you across the street?"

He sent me back a picture of a plate of hash browns.

I get some people don't wanna be a part of the inservice.

They wanna just sit there and go through it

or cut out early,

or do whatever they need to do.

I personally wanna be around the people who are gonna go,

"Look, I gotta be here, so let's see what I can take out of this."

I wish there was a way to go,

"There's a group of us that really wanna make more of this,

if we can. Soak it in, think about it, take it, and run with it."

We learn all these cool things, but

we don't have time with our colleagues to implement.

After the Inservice

They have you in a different place,

zero continuity.

You can't get anything done.

You can't work on a project.

You're usually put working with

a group of people who don't wanna work

together.

You have to have a relationship first.

How are you gonna deeply reflect on practice if you don't?

You're like, "I don't trust that guy.

I'm not gonna do anything authentic."

I wish it wasn't that way.

I just feel like those encounters are so

awkward

rushed

disjointed.

I wish it were otherwise.

I can't run a little empire

myself.

I need other skills, the ideas and talents of others.

I need *you* to make it better.

We can laugh together.

We can exchange ideas

and build

and grow.

glimmers of hope?

When you see

the students really grab onto something,

that inspires you to do more.

It doesn't take an entire class for me –

Just one or two.

It makes a huge difference,

inspires you to come back tomorrow and

do it again.

I have to remind myself to try to remain positive,

even if

I'm not there at this very moment.

There is the future to consider:

Students and

the future of education.

Hopefully, the future is where there's inspiration, because

today,

right now,

I'm not so sure.

Permission

Getting to do real work

with students and colleagues

is inspiring

but

I really need to feel like I can.

Otherwise, I won't take that initiative.

You have to feel like what you are doing is warranted,

It's welcomed.

If I don't think you wanna hear it,

I'm not gonna take initiative to tell you something

I may know.

But if you give me the room,

if I feel comfortable,

I can take something and run.

Permission comes

when it's comfortable,

when it's safe,

when everybody is exchanging ideas.

When I was brand new,

I took a lot more initiative than I do now.

I was doing more 10 years ago than I'm doing now.

Maybe I was just too stupid to know better.

It's easier to take initiative with my administrators

than within my department or at the district level.

Administrators: "Yeah! Let's do it!"

Department teachers: "Here's why we can't."

District: **RED TAPE** (unless it makes us look good)

Division

I remember when

Democrats

and

Republicans'

differences used to be based on fiscal things.

We could argue

back

and

forth

about where to spend money,

which social programs to do.

But now

we're having conversations

about how we should treat each other.

I'm sorry.

I simply cannot get on board with people

that have particular views

about how we should treat people.

I voted for Trump.

I wanted him from the business side.

I didn’t know

he was going to do all this Tweeting crock.

He’s an idiot. But

if this asshole wants to say stuff on Twitter or whatever,

fine.

I don’t have time to be that upset over something

I really don’t have a lot of control over.

If somebody is gonna look at me and say,

“I support Individual One, and I think he's doing a great job,"

I'm done.

I'm done.

Nothing is gonna get me past that.

If I'm forced to sit in a room with that person, then

I'm forced to sit in a room with that person.

But I already lost respect.

I don't know how to put that kind of stuff aside, yet.

You used to be able to go into the lunch room and just talk,

But now social justice and activism are being taught

instead of content knowledge.

With all of the

hashtag “me toos,”

hashtag movements,

political correctness,

everyone is now afraid to talk,

afraid they’re going to offend somebody,

afraid they’re going to say the wrong thing.

We have no way to communicate.

It gets to where you can’t even try to hang out and make nice with your colleagues.

We just need to find out

where we can find common ground.

I don't want to offend people.

I want to be professional.

I want to be congenial.

But I'm of a different mindset.

It’s not okay to talk like that.

I don't want you in my classroom if you're gonna talk like that.

How do you collaborate with someone on stuff with kids, when

perhaps,

they're supportive of that divide and that inequity?

They don't see themselves.

They're not looking in a mirror.

"Oh, my gosh. We're not letting the other side talk.

We're not letting the other side present their ways.

We're not letting the other side work with us.

It's either our way or no way."

I will listen to your ideas, but

I want my ideas to be heard too.

You really feel like you can't trust people who would think that way.

I come from a different moral fiber, I guess.

Do you think I am a deplorable?

I can’t have a relationship with someone like that.

I don't wanna be hanging out with teachers

who play "Fuck, Kill, Marry" about their career.

We're in uncharted waters.

This isn't the same as five years ago when

you had Democrats or Republicans,

different people with

different political backgrounds and ideas, and

you could sit in a room

with somebody who was different than you

and it wasn't an issue.

But things are different now.

The issues that are coming up are human rights issues.

Now,

I wanna be a little more woke.

I wanna be better.

Isn't that what progress is?

I don’t know.

I don’t know.

Pushing Past Perceived Pushback

I don't respond well to being bulldozed

to making quick, flip decisions to check off a box.

If we're given a task that involves checking off a box,

I can't say we're not gonna do it, but

I *can* see that as an opportunity for collaboration.

Collaboration is not

"You guys go figure something out,

We'll figure something out, and

We'll just get it all in here today."

Collaboration is

working together,

figuring it out together,

an open-ended, ongoing process.

It's just a matter of getting past the adult crap to get to the point of

getting the teachers together in a room,

allowing tension,

allowing people to get to know each other,

giving them some common ground.

How We Survive

Our job is hard.

We were talking about kids with trauma?

We have trauma too.

If you feel traumatized, you're going to

hopefully,

if you have some efficacy left,

take it into your own hands.

Either you change

or you square-peg it along,

or you could turn into a monster.

You have to adapt

You can change

You can reinvent yourself

You can learn more at any time

Maybe you can't fix the whole thing, but

You can fix tiny little things.

It's what gives us hope when we hear

things that are not very hopeful.

You learn to navigate certain systems.

We have more labels than we did before,

like a net we can get caught in. But

We also have more tools than we did before.

We can use that net,

catch, reach, help more kids.

We're ultimately trying to have hope.

We all need to be in it together.

Searching for Inspiration

What am I gonna do to get myself out

of this frustration?

Present at a conference?

Put on a workshop?

I don't know that I can really do much.

Is it that what normally would inspire me

isn't inspiring me right now?

Or is it *stress*?

It's really hard to be inspired

when you're feeling

stress:

stress we put on ourselves

stress put on us by administrators

whatever.

I once had some things that inspired me.

If I could find them again, I think

I would be inspired:

Collaboration

Community

Students

Seeing the world through students' eyes

Community is inspiring

within the classroom

within the department

within the school

It's that feeling part of something greater

(it doesn't have to be huge;

just enough)

Chapter 7: The Community

Bridge

I think

the one universal thing

that people can gather around

is probably

the kids.

The focus is off of us.

The creative community is all about the kids.

Hatching

How do you hatch something

from the moment you think

"Hey! This is an idea!"

to going about

getting it organized and

off the ground?

It's all about relationships with people.

I don't have the best social skills.

I can feel like I'm very awkward,

even just trying to approach people

I feel comfortable with.

I know we could make something happen,

actually pull something off.

But it's definitely hard.

Everyone's so overworked,

so spread so thin.

But I'll definitely approach someone I have a relationship with.

There’s trust there

and respect.

We’ll make it happen.

Wanted: Collaborators

You can't be a micro-manager

or someone who will let the small things get in the way of the big picture.

We are working with kids.

It's not going to be perfect.

If you can't get past

"All the products have to look the same.

It has to do this, this, and this,"

This isn't going to get off the ground.

I need it to be open.

My students aren't gonna be perfect.

I don't even know what it's gonna look like

until we see what they do.

You have to be really comfortable with the gray.

That's really hard for a lot of teachers:

They need to know what it's going to be before they get involved.

And there's part that's reputation:

"I can't have a flop. I can't have something fail.

If my name is on this, it has to be amazing."

Not the case with *my* name.

I've failed at a lot of things.

You have to have an organic need, a creative passion.

When those two cross in the sky,

if there's two of us who are open-minded

and can work together,

that's magic.

Defining What We Do

The creative community offers students the most freedom.

It brings out the best in our students.

It's open. It's open-ended. It's completely up to the students.

The students are driving the bus.

They know what they want.

We get to take our teacher hat off,

be a mentor,

not a teacher.

The creative community tests my teaching skills on a different level.

What's amazing is that we have kids even coming out for this,

although we have a pretty unique group of kids.

The students are the ones coming out for this, coming with ideas.

It's genuine coming from them. It's not parents making them do it.

The stuff I like to be involved with is where

you have like-minded people that

aren't checking off boxes.

No boxes to check off,

no paragraphs to fill in,

no cost analysis.

This was a grass-roots thing that filled a need.

When you see a kid trying to do something creative

that has nothing to do with school,

Why not give ‘em a hand?

That might spark their interest

in that or

other things.

I found it as a way to help a kid.

It elevates their learning to another level,

allows them to explore yet be supported

by us.

It’s really validating for kids.

They get some voice and choice.

They hear their voices matter

(that’s huge).

Even if they’re not the top academic student,

they get recognition here.

I think that’s really important.

It’s a great way to support kids.

It’s fun.

Maybe just having something fun that they initiate will

get them more interested in other things in school.

It might be the reason they come to school.

Process

When we teach,

we say we give students “complete freedom,”

but

the freedom is not complete.

There are parameters to that process,

a path each student follows.

All is well as long as you stay in the box.

This process is messy.

There is no prescribed process.

Everyone is doing some self-directed experiment,

everyone is welcome

encouraged

to find a way out of the box.

We don’t want to pigeonhole anyone.

A Place to Fail

There's room for failure here.

It is doesn't work out, it's okay.

Failure doesn't mean failure here.

Failure is a process, is part of the process.

When you have accidents, you make discoveries.

A lot of people will go, "Well that didn't work.

I'm not doing that again."

But we go, "Well, that didn't work.

How am I gonna do it the next time?"

Failure is no option?

No

No

No

Failure is one of the best teachers.

There's some astronauts that might disagree?

Apollo 13, that was different.

There really was not room for failure. Failure *was* not an option.

But they had to fail, to trial and error a lot of things before

they actually implemented the repairs.

You have to learn how to fail quickly and recover.

Get to that point, see if it's viable.

If it's not, move and

readjust

readjust

readjust quickly.

Until you figure that out,

you're not gonna be able to get to that monumental step.

Relationship Soup II

The creative community brings new relationships.

You get to know the kids in a different way,

you get to see the kids in a different way.

When you read this poetry,

a student is pouring out about her growing up,

her house in the Philippines being completely flooded,

her swimming over to get her sister out of the crib,

you're just like, "I can't believe

you lived this."

You can build relationships with students

in middle school just like you do in high school.

The relationships are just shorter.

Belief Module

Every time I'm left to myself,

Every time I'm left without a team to collaborate with,

I know I'm not as good as I could be.

I know the kids aren't getting as good as they could be getting.

I think that's the part where

I have to learn

to back up and

let it go and

maybe take the time to build some of those relationships, and

maybe get over some of the stuff that bothers me.

All those forced collaborations?

("Go back to your focus group and answer these questions.")

That's not collaboration.

You're not sharing information,

you're not sharing experiences,

you're not mentoring each other.

It's a business meeting.

But the creative community… *That's* collaboration.

You're wanting to grow

as a teacher. You're not forced.

You get to

share your experiences,

learn of other people's experiences,

comment and exchange ideas.

On a professional and a personal level, it means *more*.

The target of education is always gonna change.

It really does behoove us if we can build relationships.

It really does because

we're better together.

You have to believe that.

We have to believe that.

If everyone contributes, it's gonna be a better thing.

Your music is good because of the people in the room.

So you have to believe that

everybody working together is going to make something

that's cooler than if you did it on your own.

Credit Where Credit is Due?

The administrators don't get any of the accolades

from the creative community.

We don't either

(It's the students.)

and that's what's nice about it.

We're not in it for us.

We're in it for the student.

We prioritize students.

Motivation Subtext

It's important for us

professionally

to keep improving our craft.

(You don't want to have a sucky program.)

This is another feather in our cap.

We need to document what we do

for kids and

for posterity.

It's an opportunity to share student innovation,

to share teacher innovation.

Institutionalizing

Can creative spaces be institutionalized?

The intent is there. The principal wants it.

But!

If the creative community were institutionalized,

we would lose:

Our freedom

The change from teaching to mentorship

The nature of our relationships with students

The individualized approach to

teaching and

students

The hands-on approach to

teaching and

students

The diversity of student projects

Everything.

This community has to stay a community.

It's got to be done

on our own,

on the students' own,

student-driven.

It can't become institutionalized.

If it becomes institutionalized, it's

just

another

class.

Figure 6

From darkness and chaos…, **acrylic on canvas**

The Place of Yes as Realized Humanization

This study examined the experiences of teachers who created and mentored a creative community at the junior high school at which they taught. The creative community was designed to be inclusive and be *a place of yes* for students, but it also became a place of yes for *teachers*.

When teachers approached teaching and learning as a place of yes, school within the parameters of the creative community became that place of yes for them, even when the larger school community was a place of *no*. While the stories shared by my participants painted a dreary professional landscape of their school's faculty culture, all four teachers cited the creative community as a respite from the stress of the school culture and from the power dynamics and struggles of their curricular departments, providing a way for teachers to connect with colleagues and filled their need for collaboration and innovation. In sum, the qualities of the creative community allowed participating teachers to transcend toxic school culture, oppressive educational structures, and ideological and spatial faculty divisions, and allowed the participating teachers to connect with one another on professional and personal – human – levels. These qualities of the creative community had a humanizing effect on the participant teachers. The *place of yes* was the realized humanization of teachers.

Humanization is an ongoing process, however (Freire, 1970) – to be human is to be an unfinished being (Dewey, 1934), a constant work in progress. With this unfinishedness in mind, the findings of this study present educators and educational policy makers with food for thought pertaining to school cultures, educational structures, and teachers: While the creative community facilitated transcendence and humanization for its participant teachers, much work clearly still needs to be done, approached as an ongoing process of reflection and action. These implications

and areas of attention, as well as challenges for future inquiry, will be discussed in the following commentary.

The Effects of Structure on Culture

The findings of this study expand upon bell hooks' theory of engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), which posits that strong student-teacher relationships are critical to an educational environment in which learning can take place, indicating that collegial relationships among faculty members are just as crucial to the success of a learning environment as are teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, the findings indicate that, in addition to collegial relationships, teachers' *personal* relationships play a significant role in school culture and functionality.

Even though the importance of relationships among faculty members was emphasized throughout the findings, the study revealed several impediments to the forging of such relationships, all of which are rooted in the structures that govern educational leadership and pedagogy. This section will examine the effects of these impediments and make recommendations for implementation and further inquiry based on the study's findings.

The Marginalizing Structure of Teacher Leadership

Limitation of Voice and Perspectives. The scenarios described by the participants provide an example of how a contractually-implemented teacher leadership structure created a situation in which teachers were marginalized, and their colleagues in teacher leadership positions benefitted from and perpetuated their oppression. The lack of rotation in departmental leadership limited teacher voice and perspective in the department's function and prevented fresh

ideas from being heard. Without these new perspectives and without teachers feeling empowered to speak and be heard, departments stagnate, and students' learning suffers.

Teachers are also marginalized in departmental decision-making processes, beginning with decisions about which teacher will lead a department. Teachers have no say in the selection or removal of a department chair, even though they are directly affected by this decision; any teacher may apply for a department chair position, but the principal reviews the applications, interviews the candidates, and selects the chair. Department chairs, in theory, may be removed from their positions, but this is also done at a principal's discretion. This selection and removal arrangement gives a tremendous amount of power to a principal; the appointment of a department chair who shares a principal's vision and approach to education ensures that the principal will maintain influence at the school, even if he or she leaves the school or if local, state, or national education goals shift. Meanwhile, teachers have no say in any part of the selection or removal of department chairs, and if a principal's choice proves to be problematic in any form, teachers have no recourse and must work with whatever repercussions follow.

Financial considerations. A controversial aspect of the indefinite term of service for department chairs in the Arroyo Seco School District was that the position included a sizeable stipend based on the number of class sections in a chair's department. This stipend added between an additional 4-8% on a teacher's gross annual income which, in turn, affected the salary amount considered when determining teachers' retirement benefits. While department chairs should be compensated for the additional work they do to support a department, attaching a large stipend to a position with no term limit creates a situation in which teachers serving as department chairs may come to rely on the stipend for income and be unwilling to give up the position, even if it would be in their and the departments' best interest. This situation was

apparent at Las Colinas Junior High School: Several participants suggested that the financial benefit incentivized some department chairs to stay in their position, even though they were burned out and would have liked to step down.

The Power of Gatekeeping. Conversations with the participants indicated that power and imbalances of power were factors in teacher leadership on campus. Department chairs possessed significant power in terms of selecting curriculum, deciding how departmental money would be spent; deciding which teachers may attend conferences and other professional development activities, as well as *which* trainings they may attend; and having substantial input into their colleagues teaching assignments. The chairs also had final say on which students would be admitted to honors classes, a decision that could have significant long term effects pertaining to students' high school courses of study and college preparation.

Recommendations. Teacher leadership positions should be structured in a way that allows all teachers to speak and be heard, promotes shared decision-making and ownership of departmental goals, promotes departmental reflection, and facilitates shared development of vision.

Perhaps the most direct way of accomplishing these goals is to implement a model that many schools currently employ: Department chairs are elected to their position by the teachers in their department, serve a defined term, and are compensated with a stipend for the duration of their term. To allow opportunity for all teachers to serve and to refresh departments with new perspectives, I also propose that department chairs be limited to two or three consecutive terms, depending on the length of their tenure. Ideally, departments should have new leadership every four to five years to prevent stagnation.

Prisoners to Protocols?

Previous literature (DuFour et al., 2004; Oberg, 2008) suggested that the rigid PLC protocols might limit teacher voice and innovation, but it did not indicate the degree of this limitation or what the effects of the limitation were on a faculty and a school culture. While well-intentioned, PLC protocols, as implemented at Las Colinas, contributed to the erosion of collegial relationships, decreased large-scale collaboration, and hampered teacher innovation. My conversations with the participants revealed the effects of the increasingly restrictive protocols for teacher communication: Teacher isolation and faculty tribalism, eroded trust, and inhibited collaboration.

Recommendations. Educators must examine leadership and communication/collaboration structures at the district and school site levels – including how teacher leadership is organized, appointed, and implemented – to determine whether the current structures are working or whether the protocols are impeding communication, collaboration, and innovation. PLC protocols are one way to organize teacher communication and collaboration, but they are not the only way, nor should they be the only method used at an educational site.

Whether or not a school is using the PLC model to structure communication and collaboration, administrators must allow space for teachers to engage in productive, autonomous, collaborative activities that produce good work. This freedom is critical for innovation to happen, and ultimately, it increases teachers' collegiality and personal fulfillment. "Freedom to plan and teach creatively is conducive to both higher morale and a deeper sense of responsibility. Notice, too, that collegiality and creativity are symbiotic: Collegiality informs creativity, and creativity enriches collegiality" (Noddings, 2014, p. 18).

Campus Spaces

Spatial and design issues of schools are complicated to address. When schools are built, their architecture is determined by the prevailing instructional designs of the contemporary time. A school that is considered state-of-the-art when it opens can quickly be rendered obsolete with the advent of new technology and shifts in instructional paradigms. Education evolves, but the design of school facilities may not be flexible enough to adapt to that evolution.

Las Colinas Junior High School was a testament to this idea. The campus' physical layout limited teacher communication, interaction, and collaboration, and inhibited functionality within departments. Like other schools, Las Colinas Junior High School was constructed to meet the educational needs that were prioritized at the time. The schools in the Arroyo Seco School District, for example, were all over 50 years old, and their campuses were designed to facilitate banking method pedagogy; the classrooms were self-contained with a defined "front" of the room, and teacher workspaces and lounges were centralized in main offices.

The current movement toward collaborative project-based learning calls for open, adaptable learning spaces. While schools expect their teachers to implement these types of learning experiences for their students, doing so can be challenging in a physical plant designed for lectures, thus school districts are challenged to adapt to the collaborative model within their existing spaces. Funding prevents school districts from tearing down outdated school sites and rebuilding.

Funding Considerations

School districts rely on bond measures, which are dependent on voter approval in general elections, to fund modernization – renovations and upgrades – to their school sites. These modernization projects are infrequent and limited in scope, generally focusing on repairing

infrastructure and upgrading technology; construction of new facilities may also take place. Las Colinas Junior High School is an excellent example of the infrequency and limited nature of modernization: Twenty years ago, the 50 year-old school underwent its first-ever modernization, when it received new carpet and lighting, whiteboards to replace the original chalkboards, a new three-classroom science building, and a reconfigured parking lot. Beyond these largely cosmetic renovations, the campus' original layout and buildings were unchanged.

Without bond measures, districts must fund site improvements with grants or general fund money. Arroyo Seco School District, for example, used grant money to purchase *21st century classroom* furniture, which could be moved easily into different configurations for individual and collaborative learning activities.

While bond measures, grants, and general funds play significant roles in improving school facilities, these funds are limited, and districts must prioritize funding projects at schools with the greatest need. Even at individual campuses, funds may not cover all needs: At schools in the Arroyo Seco School District, some classrooms received the 21st century furniture, while others still had individual student desks that, in some cases, were original to the school. This situation is not unique; schools and districts across California deal with these same issues.

Recommendations

Recommendations related to campus spaces include educational decision-makers making a commitment to update or build school facilities that can adapt to change in educational paradigms and school site administrators practicing conscientious classroom assignment.

Renovating for the Future. When schools come up for modernization, districts must commit to renovating classroom spaces for the future, not just for contemporary educational trends. Because school facilities are renovated so infrequently, any renovations done must make

learning spaces adaptable to future pedagogies, even if that means demolishing portions of the campus and reconfiguring existing spaces. Designs that facilitate adaptation may include:

1. Movable/repositionable walls inside existing classroom buildings that can open up classrooms or compartmentalize large spaces into smaller work zones;
2. Window walls that can be rolled up to open classrooms to outside spaces, allowing students to work outside while maintaining teacher accessibility and supervision;
3. Freestanding classroom furniture that can be moved easily, permitting the room layout to be reconfigured as needed;
4. Electrical outlets on all walls, in the floor, and dropped from the ceiling to support technology in any classroom configuration; and
5. Dedicated collaboration and work space for teachers.

State and federal money should be allocated in the general budget to fund such extensive renovations. Schools should not have to wait years for a bond measure or grant to make renovations possible when their aging facilities impede instruction.

Conscientious Classroom Assignments. To facilitate communication, collaboration, and collegiality, teachers' classrooms should be in proximity to their academic department colleagues. Any time school sites are renovated, administrators should remap the school and assign teachers to classrooms based on department rather than where the teachers had been located previously. In the same spirit, when a school experiences a significant turnover in faculty, as Las Colinas did in the years preceding this study, administrators should examine teachers' locations on campus and reassign classroom space based on departmental affiliation rather than on easily available space. While this may cause perceived inconvenience to teachers

who are reluctant to pack up and move their classrooms, the collegial and pedagogical benefits of close department proximity are significant and worth the temporary trouble.

Community Transcends

Stifling teachers' creativity and forcing them to interact and discuss pedagogy within top-down structures can yield a breakdown in communication, innovation, and school functionality, as was the case at Las Colinas. However, also as seen at Las Colinas, a creative community can bridge divides and create connection among an otherwise isolated or tribal faculty. When teachers chose to be part of such a community, they chose to branch out from their own departments and cliques, exposing themselves to new ideas and ways of knowing.

The creative community presented teachers with the freedom to innovate, design, and implement their own organizational structures. They were given space and time to interact organically. As a result, their job satisfaction and fulfillment increased, which combatted burnout, bridged ideological divides, and validated teachers as professionals with knowledge to share and on which to expand.

The creative community was organic: Ways of operating were determined by the community participants, and teacher experience and voice were valued. The lack of parameters and accountability measures within the creative community allowed teachers to focus on their students' interests and needs, and on developing solid working relationships with one another and with their students. The creative community at Las Colinas Junior High School embodied Nel Noddings (2014) words:

> "A school is not just a center for the production of learning. At its best, it is a place with which people identify, a place to which they become attached. It is a place in which

> educators break down curriculum boundaries to work collaboratively, planning and teaching with creativity and with the steady purpose of producing better adults— caring, competent people who will live deeply satisfying lives and contribute to an evolving democratic society. Working in such a good cause, teachers are bound to have high morale." (p. 18)

Recommendations

Support and Encourage Punk Teachers. The participant teachers in this study shared what could be considered a *punk* approach to teaching. Sofianos, Ryde, and Waterhouse (2014) characterize punk ideology as valuing a do-it-yourself ethos, self-expression, and rejection of hegemonic structures, elevating "above most other aspirations the importance of freedom, self-determinism and the removal of rules" (p. 23). These qualities, as well as seminal punk band The Minutemen's founder Mike Watt's description of the ongoing search for "an easier way for people to connect without having to have these hierarchies and someone having to get stomped down" (p. 200), align with my participants' personal philosophies, their perspectives on education, their professional conduct at school, and the very establishment of the creative community. When each teacher found him- or herself up against a "wall," they found their own "go around," working within the confines of the system and bucking it just enough that they were able to survive and thrive in spite of feeling stifled.

Administrators might find punk teachers difficult or frustrating to work with, as punk teachers may not readily go along with top-down initiatives or mandates. However, this study shows that punk teachers can be sources of creativity, innovation, and energy, and they have the potential to bring other teachers on board when implementing curricula, programs, or innovations. Administrators would be wise to reach out to and cultivate these punk teachers

rather than ignore them. Administrators should give the punk teachers professional space to be themselves, allow these educators space to exercise their creativity and innovate, and provide opportunities for them to teach to their strengths. This accommodation does not have to be completely separate from the school's mission and goals. Rather, administrators should look for where the punk teachers can fit into the existing paradigm and further it along. Relinquishing this type of control can be difficult for administrators (Oberg, 2008), but, as was seen at Las Colinas, the outcomes can be powerful and help promote the school's mission as stated.

Use Community to Bridge Ideological Divides. A theme that came up frequently in interviews with participants as well as in the focus group, both explicitly and in subtext, were the divisions among faculty members based on political ideologies. The ideological divisions had widened, in some cases, to points where some teachers were unable to work together.

The creative community allowed teachers to come together despite their differences. The creative community provided a neutral space in which the teachers worked together by choice and where the political differences and ideological differences did not come into play. Although the teachers were very aware of their differences in viewpoints, they shared a common goal of supporting students and giving the students – and one another – space to create with abandon. This shared purpose transcended the teachers' differences and allowed them to work together efficiently and productively.

Additional Considerations for Further Inquiry

Other Perspectives of the Creative Community

This study examined the experiences of four teachers who were mentors within the creative community, but there are many other aspects of the community that hold potential for further study.

Transference. The success of the creative community at Las Colinas Junior High School intrigued the site principal and other administrators in the Arroyo Seco School District. Las Colinas' principal wanted to expand the community into a school-wide capstone program that would incorporate all academic subject areas and would be mandatory for all students. Other administrators were interested in establishing creative communities at other junior high schools in the district. The general spirit was that, if the creative community was a good thing at Las Colinas, it would be a good thing at any site, even if expanded to a largescale program.

The concept of the creative community and the positive outcomes for students and teachers that this type of community offers is certainly worth striving for. However, as the participant teachers pointed out so adamantly, the creative community was successful at Las Colinas because it was an organic, grass-roots innovation developed and implemented by teachers specifically for their school site. The community's fluid structure allowed students and teachers flexibility to create outside the parameters of accountability measures.

It is suggested that future inquiry examine the question of, if the creative community cannot be replicated or expanded as implemented without compromising its values and integrity, how can the *spirit* of the community be transferred to other settings and to schools' overall academic programs?

Administrators' Experiences. This study focused on the experiences of teachers who had been given the freedom to innovate and create a *place of yes* within a *system of no.* Site administrators also operate within the *system of no*, occupying a unique place where they must impose the system on their teachers while simultaneously enduring impositions from the next level up. The entire American education system, in fact, operates within this type of hegemonic structure, with one level beholden to the one directly above.

But what if it weren't so? What if administrators – site administrators, district administrators, state-level administrators – were freed from this *system of no* and given permission and freedom to innovate and create their own *place of yes* that was designed with students at the center and directed by democratic decision-making processes that included all stakeholders? What would the administrators' experiences be? Would they experience the same type of liberation, connection, and community as the mentor teachers of the creative community? The Eight Year Study (Wraga, 1994; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) examined a similar scenario in the 1930s; what would this study reveal today, if schools and districts were willing to take the creative community's freedom to the next level?

Students' Experiences. The community became a *place of yes* for the participant teachers; did it also become a *place of yes* for the students for whom it was designed? This question is worthy of future research. In fact, with a slight change in phrasing and subject, two of the driving research questions of this study could drive inquiry for a second study:

1. How do *students* experience teaching and learning when they are freed from the parameters of mandated curriculum, the idea of education as product, and high-stakes accountability measures?

2. How might permission and freedom to innovate affect *students* personally or affect *student* learning?

Teachers as Professionals

This study presents two areas for future inquiry pertaining to teachers as professionals: 1) The effects of hiring new teachers to work at the school where they completed student teaching on teacher agency, and 2) issues related to mid-career teacher burn-out.

Development of Voice and Agency in Former Student Teachers. The interactions illustrated by the sociogram raise the question of whether the presence of former master teachers affects new teachers' ability to establish their own self as an educator and develop their own agency and voice. Does the presence of former master teachers provide support for new teachers to step out on their own and innovate, or does the former master teachers' presence inhibit new teachers' innovation as they conform to the ideas and projects of their mentors? At Las Colinas, both scenarios were evident. Is this common at other schools? What role does the personality of new teachers play in this situation?

Burn-out in Mid-career Teachers. Literature and current inquiry focus largely on support and retention of new teachers during the first five years of their career. Occasionally, online blogs and memes address the stress levels of mid-career teachers, but the themes of these generally fall into two categories: "You are not alone," and "It's all about the kids, so you should accept the travails of the profession and be happy knowing you are doing good things for kids." There is little examination of the nuances of stress in mid-career teachers.

All of the participants in this study expressed that they had experienced or were currently experiencing burn-out. The degree to which the participants experienced or were experiencing burn-out varied from person to person, and individually, the feelings of burn-out varied

depending on what was happening in the teacher's respective professional and personal lives at the time.

Mid-career teacher burn-out is a concern worthy of study, because not much literature exists on this topic; extant research on teacher burn-out focuses primarily on early-career teachers, specifically support and retention of teachers within the first five years of their vocation. Teacher shortages make retention a perennial issue, but mid-career burn-out poses a particular problem: Because of their tenure in the profession, mid-career teachers face financial limitations in their ability to move within the profession.

Limitations with Salary Schedule Placement. The structure of teachers' salary schedules limits teachers' mobility within their field. If teachers wish to transfer to different school districts, they may be limited in the number of years of service they can bring with them. When teachers accept positions in school districts, part of the contract-signing process involves placement on the salary schedule, which determines a teacher's pay based on a combination of earned educational units, years of teaching experience (also called "years of service"), and years served in a specific district. Initial placement determines a teacher's base rate of pay, and any future raises or cost-of-living adjustments that the teacher may earn start from this point.

Salary schedules are designed in a way that teachers can advance rapidly in their early years of teaching and are encouraged to seek and earn a Master's degree, both of which are rewarded with increases in salary. However, school districts limit the number of years of experience that teachers can transfer for placement on salary schedules. For example, in the county in which the Arroyo Seco School District resides, 91% of the school districts place a cap on the number of years of previous teaching experience that can be transferred when placing new employees on the certificated salary schedule. Fifty-seven percent of the districts allow fewer

than 10 years to be transferred; one district caps transferable years at four. Three districts appear to be generous outliers: One allows new hires to transfer 15 years of teaching experience when they sign a contract, while two accept all years of teaching experience for placement on the salary schedule.

The inability to transfer all years of service poses a quandry for teachers who are considering transfers: Can they afford it? Not being able to transfer years of service means a pay cut for teachers – and while teachers may regain their salary after teaching for several years in their new district, they will still have lost the money they would have earned had they stayed in their old district or been able to transfer their years. This reality, paired with the financial responsibilities of supporting oneself and families, can deter teachers from making a change, even when it would be in their best interest.

This section presented some of the obstacles that prevent mid-career teachers from leaving – or even being able to leave – unsatisfying and/or stressful job situations, and the findings of this study illuminated some issues that contribute to or are effects of burn-out, but more research needs to be done on the factors that contribute to teacher burnout, the experiences of burn-out in veteran teachers, and the wide range of effects that mid-career teacher burn-out has on teachers, districts and schools, students, and education in whole. Literature focuses on teacher burn-out in early-career teachers, with the goal of supporting and retaining new teachers; if more is known about the special challenges to education that mid-career teacher burn-out presents, veteran educators can also be supported and retained until retirement. This research is critical. When teachers leave the profession, a tremendous knowledge and experience base goes with them. And most importantly, teachers who are mentally healthy are more effective at what

they do. For the sake of the profession and of students, more inquiry must be done about burnout in mid-career teachers.

The Role of Ideologies in the Teaching Profession

The effect of ideological demographics on collaboration at Las Colinas raises the question of what role diverse ideologies play in faculty cultures at schools. Considering the current charged political landscape in the United States and the relationship between faculty culture and overall school culture, this question is worth examination.

This study also presents the need for inquiry into the experiences of conservative teachers in the teaching profession. Traditionally, education is seen as a liberal profession, with union support and teachers generally supporting left-wing candidates. What attracts politically conservative teachers to this profession? How do these teachers navigate a field that is politically left? How do they reconcile themselves with curricular decisions and general educational policy-making?

Second-career Teachers

Three of this study's participants came into education as a second career, having considerable previous work experience in the military and professional fields outside of education. Their experiences within the teaching profession and active participation in the creative community invite the question of whether a teacher's work and life experience outside of TK-12 education yield a greater willingness within that teacher to step outside of a comfort zone or to interact with colleagues. Inquiry into this question could provide insight into qualities that may be germane to second career teachers and help educators facilitate collegial interaction and collaboration with second career teachers within their organizations.

Figure 7

The Place of Yes, **mixed-media on paper**

Figure 8

***Becoming,* mixed-media on canvas**

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